BATTLE OF THE LEGENDS: HOW TODAY'S STARS STACK UP

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Volume 88, No. 5 April 2009

The RING

How Sweet It Is!

The cover of the January 1999 issue of THE RING featured three photos—Ray Robinson, Ray Leonard, and the most recent entrant in the Sugar sweepstakes, 26-year-old Shane Mosley. The headline read, "Sugar Shane Mosley ... The Sweet Tradition Continues."

There was no question mark. It was a declarative sentence, calculated to stimulate debate.

To many observers, any comparison between the two previous Sugars and Mosley was sacrilege. Hell, there was still a sizable contingent that didn't think Leonard should be mentioned in the same breath as Robinson, so don't even bother bringing up Mosley.

Even so, while nobody was ready to anoint Mosley the undisputed heir to the Sugar mantel, there were some sage observers who had no difficulty giving him the benefit of the doubt. "At this point, I'd say that Mosley is at least a reasonable facsimile of the original," said HBO's Larry Merchant.

By the time Mosley defeated Oscar De La Hoya in 2000, it was growing harder and harder to dismiss comparisons to Robinson and Leonard. Even the crustiest cynic had to admit that the kid just might be something special. Maybe.

But where do you go after beating De La Hoya? There was no big fight on the horizon, and besides, anything else would be anticlimactic.

Mosley kept winning but was, at best, treading water. Then came the first Vernon Forrest fight and the beginning of Mosley's lengthy confinement to a kind of boxing purgatory where he never totally fell from grace but couldn't quite punch his way back to the promised land.

Despite the ups and downs and the lingering taint of his brush with BALCO, going into his January 24 bout with Antonio Margarito, Mosley remained a world-class performer and potential Hall of Famer. Comparisons to Robinson and Leonard, however, had ceased long ago.

But now, in the wake of Mosley's masterful knockout of the heavily favored "Tijuana Tornado," maybe it's time to reconsider his Sugar status.

Even in his darkest hours, Mosley has shown signs of greatness: The way he fought Forrest and Winky Wright again immediately after they beat him. The way he was backing up the younger man with bodyshots down the stretch in what turned out to be a losing cause against Miguel Cotto. And, most recently, the way he insisted on fighting the seemingly indestructible Margarito, when he could have faced relatively green Andre Berto instead.

Don't forget, Robinson and Leonard also had their rough patches, when it looked like they were finished. But they kept going, bucking the odds—all the while building a resume that finally placed them among the true immortals of the ring. Ultimately, it was their ability to persevere that created the touchstones of their greatness. Not the smooth sailing of their salad days.

If nothing else, Mosley is proof positive of the imprudence of judging a fighter's place in history before he's fought his final round. There will, of course, never be another Sugar Ray Robinson, or another Sugar Ray Leonard for that matter. But Mosley has certainly fought his way back to a position where comparisons are far from odious.

And nobody, least of all Margarito, would argue that he's earned the right to call himself anything he wants, including "Sugar."

◆◆◆

Ivan Goldman, THE RING's West Coast correspondent, was ringside at the Staples Center for Mosley-Margarito, and his exclusive coverage of Mosley's upset victory and its aftermath will appear in the May issue. The result of the fight came in just before press time and is not reflected in this issue's ratings.

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Opening Shot

Right On The Kisser!

"Beats the heck out of a punch in the mouth," Karoly Balzsay must be thinking as he receives a smooch from his wife, Tuende Reubl, after scoring a unanimous decision over Denis Inkin of Russia in Magdeburg, Germany. Dare we call it a Balzsay performance for the new WBO super middleweight titlist?

PHOTO BY RONNY HARTMANN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

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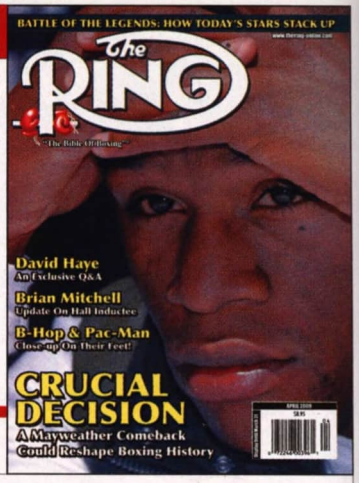

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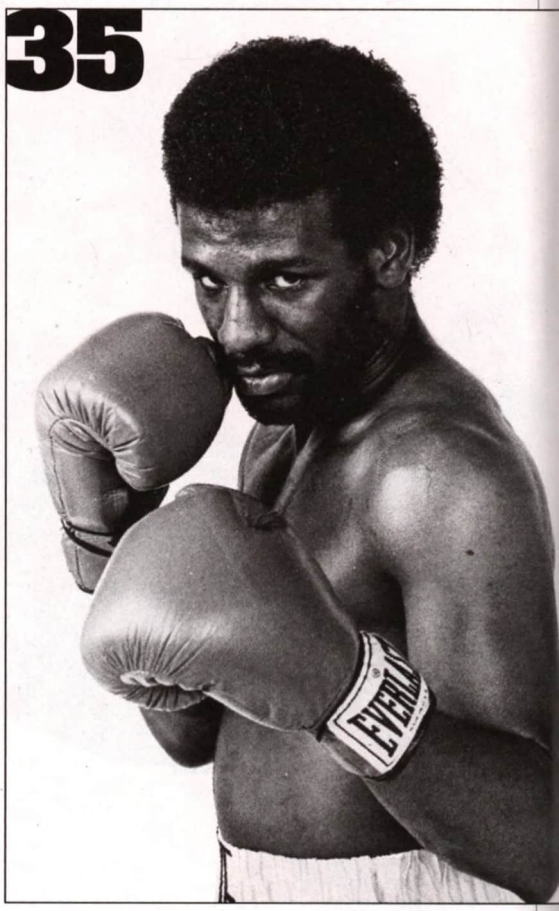

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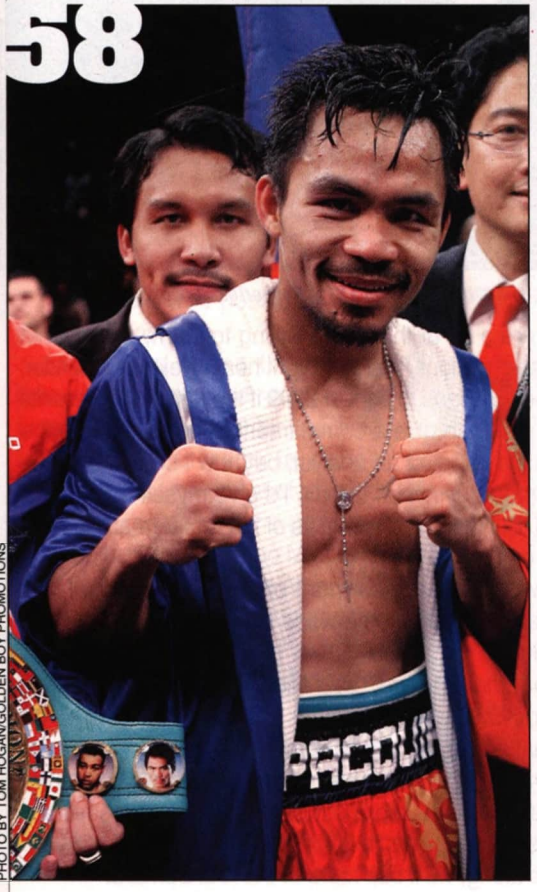

PHOTO BY TOM HOGAN/GOLDEN BOY PROMOTIONS

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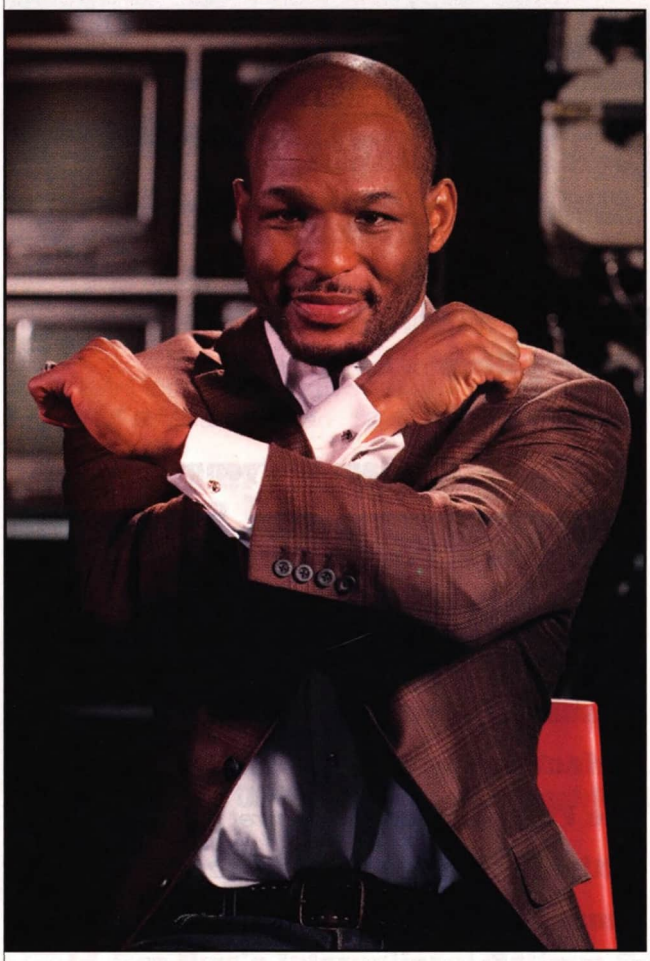
The Executioner Becomes The Elocutioner

No one will ever accuse Bernard Hopkins of being afraid to offer his opinion. The future Hall of Famer is the best quote in boxing, perhaps the best quote in sports. Just ask him a question and let him go. He'll practically write a story for you.

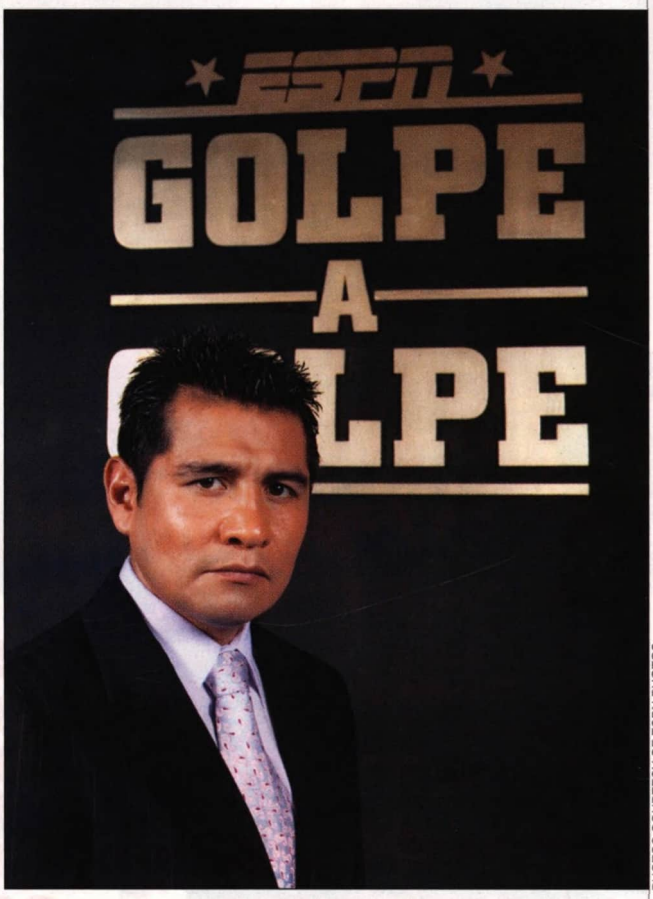
In fact, Hopkins' verbal skills have prompted more than a few people to suggest to him that he segue his career from boxer to boxing commentator. It seemed a natural fit. He only needed the chance.

On January 9, "The Executioner" began what could be a perfect marriage, making his first of 18 contracted appearances as the in-studio analyst on ESPN2's *Friday Night Fights*.

Hopkins, alongside studio host Brian Kenny, admits this is a whole new world for him. He also admits he's working on trying to change the way he expresses himself—on the air. He may be the best quote in sports, but he's also his harshest critic.



Hopkins honing his broadcasting skills



Barrera adds years of wisdom to ESPN Desportes' boxing coverage

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ESPN PHOTOS

"There are a lot of things I'm willing to learn, and I'm not afraid to ask questions," said the light heavyweight contender, who said he still plans to fight in 2009 if the right fight presents itself. "I'm willing to give a commitment to not only learn the pros and cons of being an analyst, but how I should become more and more myself on the air. I'd give myself a C-minus, maybe a B. But you got a little taste of the real Bernard the first time I was on."

ESPN would like to see more of the "real" Bernard, the one fight fans throughout the world identify with: the in-your-face Hopkins.

"We want *that* Bernard," said Nick Davis, the coordinating producer of *Friday Night Fights*. "We want Bernard to be himself. That first show he was somewhat reserved. That's not him. We want Bernard to infuse personality and opinion. We want the real Bernard Hopkins. I think he will be more himself after the first show. He had a lot of take in and a lot to deal with. As he goes along, we'll see more of the real Bernard.

"Bernard is the natural-est of naturals. He's so smart and so quick on his feet. He has the ability to stop on a dime and change direction. He's willing to take constructive criticism; he adapts very well and very quickly. Ask him one question and an hour later he's still talking. That's great in person, but not so much on live TV."

Hopkins will be among four rotating in-studio analysts, along with ESPN.com's Dan Rafael, former Telefutura boxing commentator Bernie Osuna, and cruiserweight contender B.J. Flores. Marco Antonio Barrera, another future Hall of Famer, will work in the same capacity for ESPN Deportes' *Gulpe-a-Gulpe* (*Blow-by-Blow*).

Hopkins took a tour of ESPN's Bristol, Connecticut, compound when he arrived the morning of his debut. He spoke with various ESPN commentators and personalities, picking their brains for what they do and how they shape their on-air personas.

"One thing people won't deny or dispute about me, Bernard Hopkins speaks his mind," Hopkins said. "That being said, I have to become an educated actor, being able to talk to a camera knowing I'm talking to millions of people."

Kenny, a pro's pro, feels Hopkins can do that—and more.

"This experience will be a little different for Bernard because the times he was on before was as a guest," Kenny said. "You could ask him something and he'd go on for a half-hour. The main thing with the steady appearances is that Bernard will be able to build on things. There are some technical things he needs to overcome, like not thinking about the things surrounding you, and that you have a producer talking in your ear. The more we see Bernard, the more the real Bernard Hopkins will come out. I think Bernard can be outstanding.

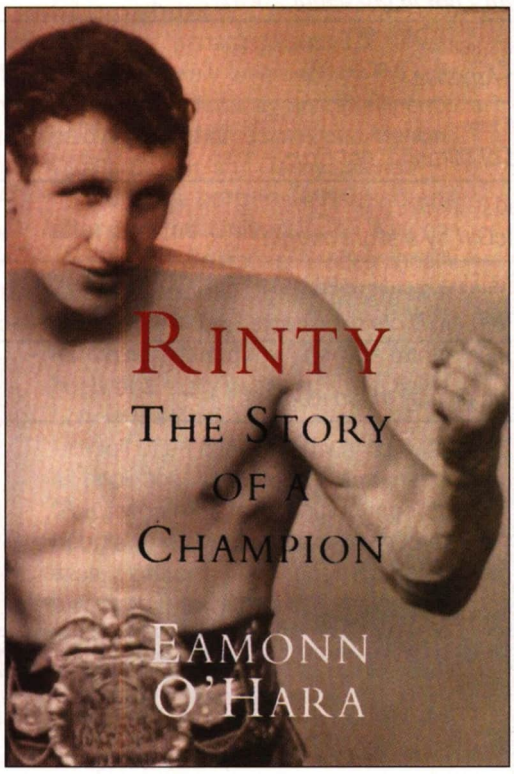
"I deal with a lot of ex-athletes and some apply themselves and use the same rigor that made them outstanding in their sport; some don't. It's how much you work at it, pay attention to it and attention to detail. Bernard is willing to do all those things. He can excel in this new realm."

—Joseph Santoliquito

Boxing Bookshelf

Maybe they've never managed to send an opponent into a 75-degree spin with a hook that comes up from their bootlaces, but it's surprising how many aspiring fighters took Rocky Balboa as their role model. Others might admit it all started when they saw the power that Popeye packed in his punch after he swallowed his spinach.

The movie character that provided the inspiration for John Joseph Monaghan was even more unusual. It was a dog. As a kid in Belfast, Northern Ireland, he was such a big fan of Rin Tin Tin, the canine star, that his grandmother nicknamed him "Rinty." Watching how his hero overcame all kinds of adversity, Rinty believed that anything was possible if you tried hard enough.



Monaghan chose the ring to follow his dreams and reached his personal peak in 1948 by knocking out Jackie Paterson in seven rounds to become undisputed world flyweight champion. The previous year, he had beaten Dado Marino to earn title recognition from America's National Boxing Association and the Irish Boxing Board, but Paterson, who had been stripped by the British Boxing Board of Control, secured a court injunction nullifying the board's action.

Monaghan celebrated both victories by taking the microphone from the announcer and singing "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling." It was a popular ritual he followed after every major contest, even when he found, in his last few fights, that chronic bronchitis left him almost breathless. The complaint forced him to retire in 1950 as undefeated world, European, British, and British Empire champion.

Monaghan was such a colorful character that it's surprising it has taken this long for anyone to pen a biography of the fighting Irishman. Eamonn O'Hara has admirably filled that void in *Rinty: The Story Of A Champion* (The Brehon Press, 224 pages, hardcover, £16.99).

It's a fascinating, well-told story. O'Hara's grasp of ring history is sometimes hazy—it was Joe Jeannette, not Jean Jeanette; Henry Armstrong won the lightweight title from Lou Ambers, not Lew Feldman; and Mike McTigue against Battling Siki was not the first world title fight to be held in Ireland (that was Tommy Burns' brief encounter with Jem Roche in 1908)—but he captures well the spirit of a born entertainer. Even when his ring career was over, Rinty's cabaret act won him fresh fans, and he was just as prepared to do it for charity as for pay.

"I kept smiling, working, going out singing, and making people laugh and be happy," he would say. Could there be a better way to be remembered?

—Patrick Myler

TV Fights of the Month

Compiled By Martin Mulcahey

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
12/19/08	Brandon Rios KO 5 Carlos Guevara	Telefutura	jl	C+	D	C
A bodyshot kayo in the fourth round was ruled a low blow						
12/19/08	Mike Alvarado KO 4 Miguel Huerta	Telefutura	jw	B-	C+	C-
Final main event of Solo Boxeo *deserved a better matchup*						
12/20/08	Antonio Lozada W 6 Tomas Sierra	TV Azteca	l	C	D+	C
Lozada's high kayo ratio is purely a product of weak opposition						
12/20/08	Guty Espadas Jr. Tech W 10 Fredy Blandon	TV Azteca	f	B-	D-	C
Accurate punching wins slow-paced fight for former titleholder						
12/20/08	Humberto Soto W 12 Francisco Lorenzo	TV Azteca	jl	A-	B	C+
Referee could not prevent Soto from winning a title this time						
12/20/08	Mads Larsen KO 7 Roberto Cocco	PPV	sm	B	C	C+
Former kickboxing champ's corner wisely throws in the towel						
12/20/08	Nikolay Valuev W 12 Evander Holyfield	PPV	h	B	D	D
The only thing worse than the ring action was the judging						
01/09/09	Erislandy Lara KO 1 Rodrigo Aguiar	ESPN2	jm	C	C	C+
Best performance of the night by a Cuban						
01/09/09	Odlanier Solis KO 8 Kevin Burnett	ESPN2	h	B-	C	C+
Cuban Olympic gold medalist has a big belly and fast hands						
01/09/09	Yuriorkis Gamboa KO 10 Roger Gonzalez	ESPN2	f	B+	C	C+
Like Felix Trinidad, Gamboa gets mad only when you knock him down						
01/16/09	Gary Russell KO 3 Antonio Reyes	Showtime	f	C-	C-	C+
American Olympian breaks opponent's jaw in pro debut						
01/16/09	Marvin Quintero KO 3 Nick Casal	Showtime	jl	C	C+	B-
Mexican slugger passes first test in America						
01/16/09	Orlando Cruz KO 5 Leonilo Miranda	Showtime	f	C	B-	B
The one-punch kayo was expected of Miranda, not Cruz						
01/16/09	Angel Hernandez W 10 Buddy McGirt Jr.	ESPN2	m	C+	C+	C+
My eyes and punchstats favored McGirt by a slight margin						
01/16/09	Eromosele Albert W 10 Germaine Sanders	ESPN2	jm	C+	C	C
Late substitute provides brisk workout						
01/17/09	Andre Berto W 12 Luis Collazo	HBO	w	A-	A-	A
Berto's strengths and weaknesses on display in fun slugfest						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Two-Of-A-Kind Say Goodbye

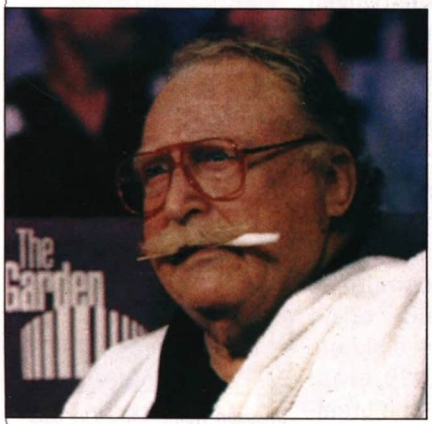
At a time when colorful boxing managers are scarcer than good heavyweights, it is with sadness that we address the passing of two more: Howie Albert and Dave Wolf.

Albert, 86, passed away January 3, 2009, in Secaucus, New Jersey. Fight buffs know Albert as the man who introduced Emile Griffith to boxing after hiring him to work in his New York hat factory. After noticing Griffith's athletic physique, Albert entered him in the New York Golden Gloves. Griffith often joked that Albert tricked him into becoming a fighter. Griffith became a four-time welterweight champion and twice won middleweight laurels.

Albert's partner was Hall of Fame trainer Gil Clancy. In the words of Bill Gallo of the New York *Daily News*, Albert and Clancy "trained, managed, and baby-sat more than 70 fighters." Griffith was the jewel in his crown, but Albert also managed or co-managed Juan LaPorte, Rodrigo Valdes, Harold Weston, Jerry Quarry, George Foreman, and others. Albert was a hands-on manager, often working alongside Clancy in the corner during fights.

Along with his involvement with New York's Ring 8, Albert was inducted into the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990. In 2005, the Boxing Writers Association of America presented Albert with the rarely bestowed James A. Farley Award for honesty and integrity.

Albert and Wolf shared the unfortunate distinction of managing fighters involved in two of boxing's most notorious tragedies. Benny "Kid" Paret died after injuries received in a 1962 bout with Griffith, while Wolf managed Ray Mancini, whose 1982 bout with Deuk Koo Kim resulted in Kim's death. "I knew when I got involved in boxing that this could happen," Wolf said.



Albert discovered Emile Griffith at a hat factory

Wolf went from journalist to manager

Dave Wolf entered boxing as a journalist. He'd been a United Press reporter, an editor at *Life* magazine, and was the author of *Foul*, the acclaimed biography of basketball star Connie Hawkins. During the early-1970s, Wolf was approached to help write Joe Frazier's autobiography. The project fell through, but Wolf grew intrigued with the idea of managing fighters. Wolf was not immediately embraced by the fight mob, but his tenacity and intelligence paid off. His charges included Mancini, Duane Bobick, and Donny Lalonde.

Wolf was born in Manhattan and attended the University of Wisconsin. His blunt personality occasionally rankled people, although he was adored by those close to him. Wolf left boxing during the late-'90s on the heels of a nasty public split with fighter Lonnie Bradley.

Wolf often considered writing a tell-all book about his days as a manager. "But I would have to camouflage the people and events," he said. "Otherwise, I better have enough money to buy myself an island in the middle of the Pacific. It would be the only place where I'd be safe."

On December 23, 2008, after a long battle with leukemia, Wolf died in his sleep. He was 65.

—Don Stradley

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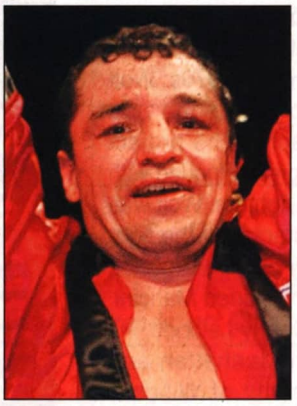
Outside the Ropes

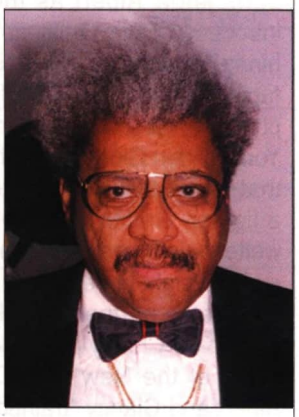
PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Silverglade: Ready to promote

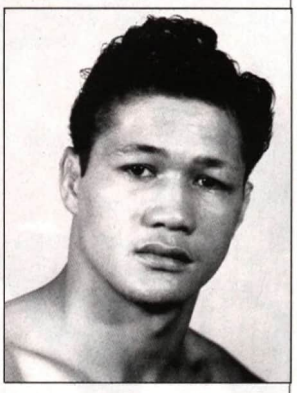
Gleason's Gym has been part of the boxing fabric in the United States since 1937. Almost everyone famous in boxing trained at Gleason's at one time or another. Now **Bruce Silverglade**, owner of the historic training complex, is looking to use the Gleason's brand to promote fights, starting in February at the Masonic Temple, in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. According to Silverglade, it's been 20 years since Gleason's last promoted a fight. The fabled gym, located underneath the Brooklyn Bridge, used to promote monthly shows. Silverglade's grand plan is to host a show the first Tuesday of each month ... San Francisco-based trainer **John Bray** is seeking to help at-risk children in San Fernando Valley, California, by establishing the John Bray Boxing Foundation. After recovering from a near-fatal stroke in 2001, Bray made a vow to himself that he would address the street issues of drugs and crime. Anyone interested in aiding Bray could access information at johnbrayboxingfoundation.org, or contact **Jerry Gonzalez** at jerrygonzalez@csufresno.edu . . . Former WBC super middleweight titlist **Davey Hilton**, 45, received some good news from the judicial system for once when a Montreal judge acquitted him of sexual assault, assault, and assault causing bodily harm to a 48-year-old woman, who recanted the charges saying she no longer wanted to pursue the case. Hilton had been ordered to live in a halfway house while completing the seven-year, eight-month sentence he received in May 2001 for sexually abusing his two daughters, **Anne-Maire** and **Jeannine Hilton** ... **Don King** is downsizing. That's the explanation the Hall of Fame promoter gave as to why he was selling his oceanfront Manalapan property, in Palm Beach, Florida. The compound consists of two homes and three acres of prime ocean and intracoastal property. When King was asked why he opted to sell his property, he said, "At this time, it's time to downsize. I'm sure someone else will enjoy living here as much as I have" ... A car accident tragically took the life of rising prospect 21-year-old **Jizelle Salandy**. The Trinidad and Tobago native's loss reached such national proportions that Prime Minister **Patrick Manning** issued a statement offering condolences ... Uganda said goodbye to one of its most beloved sports figures on January 13 with the death **Leo Rwabwogo**, 58, a flyweight Olympic bronze medalist in 1968 and silver medalist in '72. Rwabwogo, who collapsed and died while tending his garden, is the only Ugandan to have ever won two Olympic medals. Rwabwogo "is not only an irreplaceable talent, but also a cornerstone in the sport. He was a source of inspiration, reference, and wisdom," said Uganda Amateur Boxing Federation secretary **David Kyambadde**, a contemporary of Rwabwogo's ... **Bernard "Big Duke" Docusen** died of a heart attack after lapsing into a coma on January 11. Docusen, 81, went 15 hard rounds with **Sugar Ray Robinson** for the welterweight world championship on June 28, 1948, losing a close decision. His 10-year career produced a 72-10-6 (21) record. In 1976, he was inducted into the New Orleans Sports Hall of Fame, and in 2008 the California Boxing Hall of Fame. Docusen is survived by his wife of 64 years, **Ernestine**, six children, 15 grandchildren, 29 great grand children, and one great-great grandchild.



Hilton: Acquitted



King: Ready to sell



Docusen: Remembered for fighting Sugar Ray

Quotable

"We will not be messed around."

—Ray Hatton, Ricky Hatton's father and manager, threatening to pull "The Hitman" from a mega-fight with Manny Pacquaio if Team Hatton didn't get the proposed 50-50 split

"The critics who matter are HBO's subscribers, who've stopped watching fights on HBO and are driving ratings to record lows. The problem isn't what I'm writing. The problem is what I'm writing about."

—Thomas Hauser for Secondsout.com about HBO's plummeting 2008 boxing ratings

[Ratings Analysis]

For Period Ended January 18, 2009

Heavyweights: No changes.
Cruiserweights: O'Neil Bell (fifth last issue) exits due to inactivity, allowing everyone from five to 10 to move up one place each. Bell's departure enabled Matt Godfrey to re-enter the ratings, coming in at 10.
Light Heavyweights: No changes.
Super Middleweights: Karoly Balzsay debuts at nine after scoring a 12-round decision over Denis Inkin (ninth last issue), who drops to 10. Inkin's demotion eliminates Andre Dirrell (10th last issue).
Middleweights: No changes.
Junior Middleweights: No changes.
Welterweights: Andre Berto (ninth last issue) switches positions with Zab Judah (seventh last issue) on the strength of his close decision victory over eighth-rated Luis Collazo. Judah has not beaten anyone currently rated in the top 10.
Junior Welterweights: No changes.
Lightweights: No changes.
Junior Lightweights: No changes.
Featherweights: No changes.
Junior Featherweights: Bernabe Concepcion (ninth last issue) exits to campaign at featherweight, allowing Rendall Munroe (10th last issue) to move up to nine and permit Toshiaki Nishioka to debut at 10, thanks to a 12th-round stoppage over Genaro Garcia.
Bantamweights: No changes.
Junior Bantamweights: No changes.
Flyweights: Denkaosan Kaovichit (sixth last issue) switches places with Takefumi Sakata (fourth last issue), based on his second-round knockout of Sakata.
Junior Flyweights: No changes.
Strawweights: No changes.
Pound-for-pound: No changes.

PHOTO BY RONNY HARTMAN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Balzsay's arm is raised by WBO President Francisco Varcarcel

The RING
"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

Pound-For-Pound

1. **Manny Pacquiao**
   Lightweight/Welterweight
2. **Juan Manuel Marquez**
   Lightweight
3. **Joe Calzaghe**
   Light Heavyweight
4. **Bernard Hopkins**
   Light Heavyweight
5. **Israel Vazquez**
   Junior Featherweight
6. **Antonio Margarito**
   Welterweight
7. **Rafael Marquez**
   Junior Featherweight
8. **Miguel Cotto**
   Welterweight
9. **Ivan Calderon**
   Junior Flyweight
10. **Ricky Hatton**
    Junior Welterweight

For weekly updated Ring ratings, go to **TheRing-online.com**

The Ring Ratings

For Period Ended January 18, 2009

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by THE RING are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between THE RING's number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

THE RING Ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board, with the participation of THE RING Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world. To see the complete list of our panelists, click on "Ratings" at thering-online.com.

Records provided by boxrec.com.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Welterweight Andre Berto leaps to seven after beating Luis Collazo

Heavyweights

Weight Unlimited

Champ: Vacant

1. **WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO** Ukraine 52-3 (46)
2. **VITALI KLITSCHKO** Ukraine 36-2 (35)
3. **RUSLAN CHAGAEV** Uzbekistan 24-0-1 (17)
4. **ALEXANDER POVETKIN** Russia 16-0 (12)
5. **NICOLAY VALUEV** Russia 50-1 (34)
6. **SULTAN IBRAGIMOV** Russia 22-1-1 (17)
7. **SAMUEL PETER** Nigeria 30-2 (23)
8. **OLEG MASKAEV** Kazakhstan 35-6 (26)
9. **JUAN CARLOS GOMEZ** Cuba 44-1 (35)
10. **ALEXANDER DIMITRENKO** Ukraine 29-0 (19)

Jr. Middleweights

Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **VERNON FORREST** Atlanta, GA 41-3 (29)
2. **PAUL WILLIAMS** Augusta, GA 36-1 (27)
3. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Belize 42-11-1 (21)
4. **CORY SPINKS** St. Louis, MO 36-5 (11)
5. **SERGIO MORA** Los Angeles, CA 21-1-1 (5)
6. **SERGIO MARTINEZ** Argentina 44-1-1 (24)
7. **SERGEI DZINZIRUK** Ukraine 36-0 (22)
8. **DANIEL SANTOS** Puerto Rico 32-3-1 (23)
9. **JOACHIM ALCINE** Haiti 30-1 (19)
10. **JAMES KIRKLAND** Austin, TX 24-0 (21)

Featherweights

Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 42-0-1 (22)
2. **STEVEN LUEVANO** La Puente, CA 36-1-1 (15)
3. **JORGE SOLIS** Mexico 36-1-2 (26)
4. **HIROYUKI ENOKI** Japan 27-1-2 (19)
5. **MARIO SANTIAGO** Puerto Rico 19-1-1 (14)
6. **MARTIN HONORIO** Mexico 25-4-1 (13)
7. **OSCAR LARIOS** Mexico 63-6-1 (39)
8. **TAKAHIRO AOH** Japan 16-1-1 (8)
9. **CRISTOBAL CRUZ** Mexico 37-11-1 (23)
10. **CHOI TSEVEENPUREV** Mongolia 27-4 (19)

Jr. Featherweights

Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: ISRAEL VAZQUEZ Mexico 43-4 (31)

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 37-5 (33)
2. **CELESTINO CABALLERO** Panama 31-2 (22)
3. **JUAN MANUEL LOPEZ** Puerto Rico 24-0 (22)
4. **POONSAWAT KRATINGAENGGYM** Thailand 36-1 (25)
5. **DANIEL PONCE DE LEON** Mexico 35-2 (31)
6. **STEVE MOLITOR** Canada 28-1 (11)
7. **RICARDO CORDOBA** Panama 34-1-2 (21)
8. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 40-6 (34)
9. **RENDALL MUNROE** England 16-1 (7)
10. **TOSHIAKI NISHIOKA** Japan 33-4-3 (20)

Bantamweights

Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **HOZUMI HASEGAWA** Japan 25-2 (9)
2. **ANSELMO MORENO** Panama 24-1-1 (8)
3. **WLADIMIR SIDORENKO** Ukraine 21-1-2 (7)
4. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 22-2 (18)
5. **JOSEPH AGBEKO** Ghana 26-1 (22)
6. **GERRY PENALOSA** Philippines 53-6-2 (36)
7. **ABNER MARES** Mexico 17-0 (10)
8. **VUSI MALINGA** South Africa 18-2-1 (11)
9. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ** Panama 27-2 (20)
10. **WILLIAM GONZALEZ** Nicaragua 21-3 (19)

Cruiserweights
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: TOMASZ ADAMEK
Poland 36-1 (24)

1. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
Philadelphia, PA 21-2 (11)
2. **KRZYSZTOF WLODARCZYK**
Poland 41-2 (31)
3. **GUILLERMO JONES**
Panama 36-3-2 (28)
4. **FIRAT ARSLAN**
Germany 29-4-1 (18)
5. **ENZO MACCARINELLI**
Wales 29-2 (22)
6. **MARCO HUCK**
Yugoslavia 23-1 (18)
7. **VADIM TOKAREV**
Russia 26-1-1 (19)
8. **GIACOBBE FRAGOMENI**
Italy 26-1 (10)
9. **B.J. FLORES**
Chandler, AZ 21-0 (13)
10. **MATT GODFREY**
Providence, RI 18-1 (10)

Light Heavyweights
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: JOE CALZAGHE
Wales 46-0 (32)

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
Philadelphia, PA 49-5-1 (32)
2. **CHAD DAWSON**
New Haven, CT 27-0 (17)
3. **GLEN JOHNSON**
Jamaica 48-12-2 (33)
4. **ANTONIO TARVER**
Orlando, FL 27-5 (19)
5. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
Hungary 30-0 (17)
6. **ROY JONES**
Pensacola, FL 52-5 (38)
7. **CLINTON WOODS**
England 41-4-1 (24)
8. **ADRIAN DIACONU**
Romania 25-0 (15)
9. **HUGO GARAY**
Argentina 32-3 (17)
10. **CHRIS HENRY**
Houston, TX 22-1 (18)

Super Middleweights
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
Denmark 41-1 (31)
2. **LUCIAN BUTE**
Romania 23-0 (18)
3. **LIBRADO ANDRADE**
Mexico 27-2 (21)
4. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
Australia 34-3 (23)
5. **JERMAIN TAYLOR**
Little Rock, AR 28-2-1 (17)
6. **CARL FROCH**
England 24-0 (20)
7. **SAKIO BIKA**
Cameroon 27-3-2 (17)
8. **ALLAN GREEN**
Tulsa, OK 27-1 (19)
9. **KAROLY BALZSAY**
Hungary 20-0 (14)
10. **DENIS INKIN**
Russia 34-1 (24

Middleweights
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: KELLY PAVLIK
Youngstown, OH 34-1 (30)

1. **ARTHUR ABRAHAM**
Armenia 28-0 (23)
2. **FELIX STURM**
Germany 31-2-1 (13)
3. **SEBASTIAN SYLVESTER**
Germany 29-3 (14)
4. **KHOREN GEVOR**
Armenia 30-3 (16)
5. **RANDY GRIFFIN**
Louisville, KY 24-2-3 (12)
6. **DAVID LOPEZ**
Mexico 37-12 (23)
7. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO**
Spain 62-8 (43)
8. **MARCO ANTONIO RUBIO**
Mexico 43-4-1 (37)
9. **AMIN ASIKAINEN**
Finland 25-2 (17)
10. **DANIEL GEALE**
Australia 20-0 (12)

Welterweights
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
Mexico 37-5 (27)
2. **MIGUEL COTTO**
Puerto Rico 32-1 (26)
3. **SHANE MOSLEY**
Pomona, CA 45-5 (38)
4. **JOSHUA CLOTTEY**
Ghana 35-2 (20)
5. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines 48-3-2 (36)
6. **CARLOS QUINTANA**
Puerto Rico 26-2 (20)
7. **ANDRE BERTO**
Winter Haven, FL 24-0 (19)
8. **LUIS COLLAZO**
Queens, NY 29-4 (14)
9. **ZAB JUDAH**
Brooklyn, NY 37-6 (25)
10. **ISAAC HLATSWAYO**
South Africa 28-1-1 (10)

Jr. Welterweights
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: RICKY HATTON
England 45-1 (32)

1. **TIMOTHY BRADLEY**
Palm Springs, CA 23-0 (11)
2. **JUNIOR WITTER**
England 37-2-2 (22)
3. **ANDREAS KOTELNIK**
Ukraine 30-2-1 (13)
4. **PAUL MALIGNAGGI**
Brooklyn, NY 25-2 (5)
5. **HERMAN NGOUPJO**
Cameroon 17-2 (9)
6. **KENDALL HOLT**
Paterson, NJ 25-2 (13)
7. **RICARDO TORRES**
Colombia 32-2 (28)
8. **JUAN URANGO**
Colombia 20-1-1 (16)
9. **MARCOS MAIDANA**
Argentina 25-0 (24)
10. **JUAN LAZCANO**
Mexico 37-5-1 (27)

Lightweights
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ
Mexico 49-4-1 (36)

1. **NATE CAMPBELL**
Jacksonville, FL 32-5-1 (25)
2. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Philippines 48-3-2 (36)
3. **JUAN DIAZ**
Houston, TX 34-1 (17)
4. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
Cuba 36-4-1 (22)
5. **DAVID DIAZ**
Chicago, IL 34-2-1 (17)
6. **JULIO DIAZ**
Mexico 36-4 (26)
7. **ANTONIO PITALUA**
Mexico 46-3 (40)
8. **MICHAEL KATSIDIS**
Australia 23-2 (20)
9. **ALI FUNEKA**
South Africa 30-1-2 (25)
10. **YURI ROMANOV**
Belarus 21-2 (14)

Jr. Lightweights
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **EDWIN VALERO**
Venezuela 24-0 (24)
2. **HUMBERTO SOTO**
Mexico 46-7-2 (29)
3. **ROCKY JUAREZ**
Houston, TX 28-4 (20)
4. **CASSIUS BALOYI**
South Africa 36-3-1 (19)
5. **MZONKE FANA**
South Africa 28-4 (11)
6. **NICKY COOK**
England 29-1(16)
7. **JORGE BARRIOS**
Argentina 47-4-1 (34)
8. **URBANO ANTILLON**
Mexico 25-0 (18)
9. **ROMAN MARTINEZ**
Puerto Rico 21-0-1 (12)
10. **JORGE LINARES**
Venezuela 26-0 (17)

Jr. Bantamweights
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
Armenia 31-1-1 (25)
2. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
Mexico 38-2-1 (28)
3. **CRISTIAN MIJARES**
Mexico 36-4-2 (15)
4. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
Venezuela 32-3 (27)
5. **NOBUO NASHIRO**
Japan 12-1 (7)
6. **JORGE ARCE**
Mexico 51-4-1 (39)
7. **JOSE NAVARRO**
Los Angeles, CA 26-4 (12)
8. **Z GORRES**
Philippines 28-2-2 (15)
9. **DIMITRI KIRILOV**
Russia 29-4-1 (9)
10. **KOHEI KONO**
Japan 21-4 (7)

Flyweights
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **NONITO DONAIRE**
Philippines 20-1 (13)
2. **DAISUKE NAITO**
Japan 34-2-3 (22)
3. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
Thailand 70-3-1 (37)
4. **DENKAOSAN KAOVICHIT**
Thailand 46-1-1 (20)
5. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
Argentina 28-0-2 (17)
6. **TAKEFUMI SAKATA**
Japan 33-5-2 (15)
7. **JOSE LOPEZ**
Puerto Rico 38-7-2 (32)
8. **KOKI KAMEDA**
Japan 19-0 (12)
9. **HUGO CAZARES**
Mexico 26-5-1 (19)
10. **MORUTI MTHALANE**
South Africa 22-2 (15)

Jr. Flyweights
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: IVAN CALDERON
Puerto Rico 32-0 (6)

1. **ULISES SOLIS**
Mexico 28-1-2 (20)
2. **EDGAR SOSA**
Mexico 34-5 (18)
3. **CESAR CANCHILA**
Colombia 27-1 (21)
4. **GIOVANNI SEGURA**
Mexico 19-1-1 (15)
5. **JUANITO RUBILLAR**
Philippines 46-11-7 (22)
6. **OMAR NINO**
Mexico 27-3-1 (11)
7. **NELSON DIEPPA**
Puerto Rico 25-5-2 (14)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
France 23-2 (9)
9. **JUAN CARLOS REVECO**
Argentina 18-1 (9)
10. **BERT BATAWANG**
Philippines 48-11-1 (36)

Strawweights
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
Nicaragua 22-0 (20)
2. **RAUL GARCIA**
Mexico 25-0-1 (15)
3. **OLEYDONG SITHSAMERCHAI**
Thailand 29-0 (12)
4. **FLORANTE CONDES**
Philippines 23-4-1 (20)
5. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
Indonesia 62-6-5 (31)
6. **KATSUNARI TAKAYAMA**
Japan 22-3 (9)
7. **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines 23-1-3 (14)
8. **NKOSINATHI JOYI**
South Africa 19-0 (15)
9. **JUAN PALACIOS**
Nicaragua 25-2 (20)
10. **RONALD BARRERA**
Colombia 26-5-1 (16)

By Jeff Ryan

Welsh Rare Bit

For all of his athletic prowess, Joe Calzaghe probably can't throw a spiral 40 yards downfield, scramble out of reach of an onrushing linebacker, or lower his shoulder and crash over the goal line from a yard out. Nonetheless, he sure is doing a pretty good impression of Brett Favre. As we went to press, the light heavyweight champion was treating us to his version of the annual Favre exercise entitled, "Gee, do I retire or not?" And just like the quarterback, the 37-year-old Calzaghe was enjoying the heck out of the ego-boosting attention that the withholding of his future plans was commanding.

"I don't mind the speculation," Calzaghe told the *South Wales Argus*. "To be honest, it amuses me."

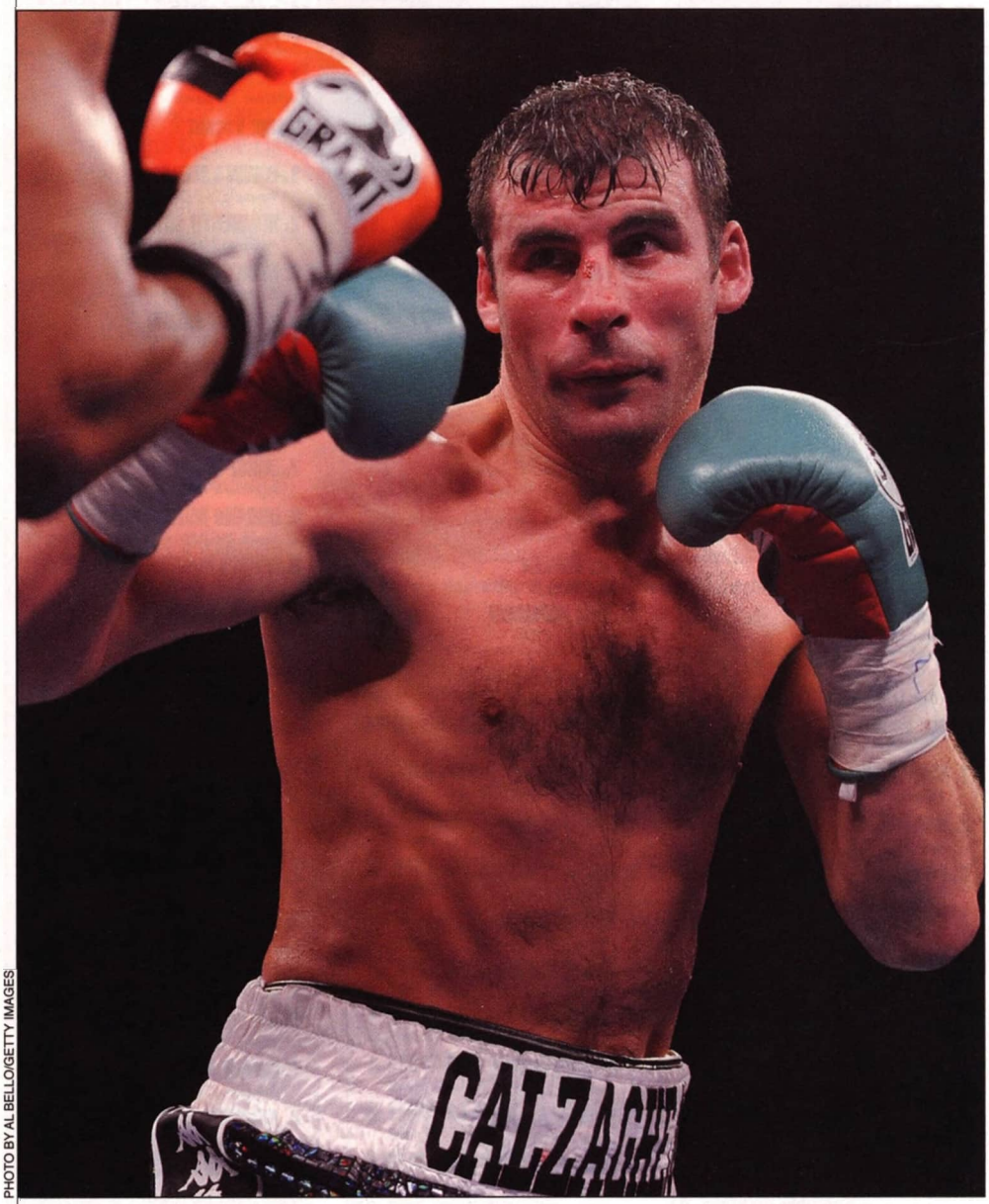


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Ryan urges Calzaghe to keep fighting

When you're wealthy, undefeated, in possession of a championship belt from one of the original eight weight classes, and in position to either: a) retreat to a life of leisure and luxury, or b) handpick your next ring challenge, life indeed seems grand. Heck, with the exception of Ralph Kramden at the wheel of the cross-town bus, you couldn't find a guy in a bigger driver's seat. Or so it appears.

In reality, Calzaghe doesn't have a tough decision to make. In fact, there's only one way to go. For while the consensus has been that retirement was the most likely route he'd take following his one-sided pounding of Roy Jones at Madison Square Garden in November, the truth is that walking away now wouldn't be Calzaghe's best course of action. Not if he values his legacy.

With a mark of 46-0 (32), world titles in two weight classes, and victories over two legends in Jones and Bernard Hopkins, Calzaghe is a certain Hall of Famer. But induction into a sport's hallowed hall doesn't auto-

PHOTO BY TOM HOGAN/GOLDEN BOY PROMOTIONS

Is this why Calzaghe doesn't want another dose of B-Hop?

matically tie up everything in a neat little package. (Sugar Ray Robinson is in Canastota, but so is Barry McGuigan.) Calzaghe's resume may look complete, but are historians going to one day consider him a true ring immortal? Maybe not, if his career was to end now.

Calzaghe has some solid wins on his ledger, but in his two biggest career outings he was decked by a 39-year-old Jones and a 43-year-old Hopkins. He struggled to gain a sloppy split decision in the Hopkins bout, and only the most diehard Calzaghe loyalists believe the Welshman would have prevailed if he'd been facing the Hopkins of a decade ago. Calzaghe was very impressive in dismantling Jeff Lacy in 2006 and he turned back Mikkel Kessler when the Dane was rated first by THE RING at 168 pounds. But being the all-time best at super middleweight, a division that didn't even exist until the early-'80s, and squeaking by Hopkins isn't going to be enough to wow tough-to-please historians.

It's not like me to urge a fighter who's considering retirement, particularly a financially secure one, to keep going. But Calzaghe doesn't cause me concern. He hasn't been defeated, had his psyche damaged, or taken any bad beatings. Those who believe there are no challenges left out there for him need only turn to the ratings pages of this magazine. Calzaghe has dismissed talk of a Hopkins rematch as though one had the temerity to suggest that he meet Peter Manfredo Jr. again. But the don't-waste-my-time demeanor seems to be masking a real desire to avoid the crafty and dangerous "Executioner." Calzaghe vs. B-Hop II remains intriguing.

There's also the option of moving up to cruiserweight to tackle Tomasz Adamek and capture a third crown. And, of course, sitting in the top spot among the light heavyweight contenders is unbeaten and especially impressive Chad Dawson. Some of the same people who say Calzaghe has nothing left to prove point out that a clash with Dawson would be "risky." Well, if it's risky, then it's a serious challenge for Calzaghe. And if it's a serious challenge, then there *is* still unfinished business out there for him.

Sunken (Treasure) Chest: One of the favorite pieces of sports memorabilia in my ever-growing collection is actually not in my collection at all. It's lost. Thirty-five years ago, I sent away for a Muhammad Ali-George Foreman commemorative keychain. It's probably of little value, but what was neat about it was that it had the original date of the bout, September 24, 1974, stamped on it. After Foreman was cut in training, the fight was rescheduled for October 30, but I doubt a corrected keychain was ever reissued.

Anyway, my futile search for that silly trinket got me wondering about all of the great boxing memorabilia that's probably been misplaced through the years. None of it ever turns up on eBay or in any collection that I've ever seen at card shows or on television. It would be nice to know whatever happened to …

•**Ali's red trunks:** Following his return from a 3½-year layoff, The Greatest wore white trunks in 30 of his 32 bouts. The two exceptions: His 1970 knockout of Oscar Bonavena and the first war with Joe Frazier.

•**Foreman's red trunks:** Big George claims the ones he wore for his kayo of Michael Moorer were the same pair he donned when he blew out Frazier 21 years earlier. Let's get a hold of them, along with some old photos, and see if he's telling the truth.

Personal Perceptions:

The last word on everything from Ricky to tricky:

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/WIRE IMAGES

You can bet these lads know how to play "Walking In A Hatton Wonderland"

•Posters for Manny Pacquiao vs. Ricky Hatton should advertise the showdown as "The Brawl For The Hall." If Hatton wins, he's a lock for Canastota. If he falters, my vote is that he hasn't done enough in his career to warrant entry.

•Short of "Hitman" retiring, is there some way we can do away with that moronic "Walking In A Hatton Wonderland" song? How silly of me to think it was merely a seasonal tune dusted off at Christmastime. Much to the dismay of my eardrums, Hatton's nutty followers have turned it into a year-round form of torture.

•In January, baseball superstar Mark McGwire was again denied entry to Cooperstown despite his 583 career home runs. *Hmmm.* That doesn't bode well for "Sugar" Shane Mosley's chances when boxing writers get to consider his candidacy one day.

•In Tomas Adamek, Polish fans have found their anti-Golota, a guy who doesn't search for the nearest illuminated exit sign as soon as things get tough.

•Cheers to the selection of Gus Johnson as a replacement for blow-by-blow man Steve Albert on *Showtime Championship Boxing*. Johnson, whose work on New York Knicks radiocasts has always impressed me, possesses an underrated quality. One that you'd think ought to be a requirement in his business, but, oddly, isn't. That's a great voice.

•The American Sportscasters Association recently named its "Top 50 Broadcasters" of all-time. Baseball's Vin Scully placed first. As far as boxing's mike men go, Cosell ranked fifth, but the great Don Dunphy placed a distant 14th, behind the likes of Jack Buck, Al Michaels, and Dick Enberg. That's simply foolish. By the way, Max Kellerman didn't make the cut.

•It's ironic that boxing—which involves guys forever in retreat—actually features fewer backpedalers than almost every other sport. Every week we read and hear teammate blasting teammate in the NFL, player second-guessing coach in the NHL, or rival ripping rival in the NBA, only to have the big mouth later retract his statements or "clear up some misconceptions" about them. How lame. When is the last time you heard a fighter turn chicken like that?

•The recent death of Dave Wolf, the former manager of Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini, rekindled the debate over how great a career-guider Wolf was. In making Mancini a multimillionaire and TV superstar while steering him away from Grade A competition, was Wolf writing the playbook for managerial brilliance? Or was he instead a con man who knew his product was inferior, but tried to sell it to us as top-notch anyway?

•**Foreman's American flag:** The tiny one he waved after winning a gold medal in Mexico City in 1968.

•**A photo of Ray Leonard Jr.:** Specifically, the picture his dad wore on his sock at the '76 Olympics.

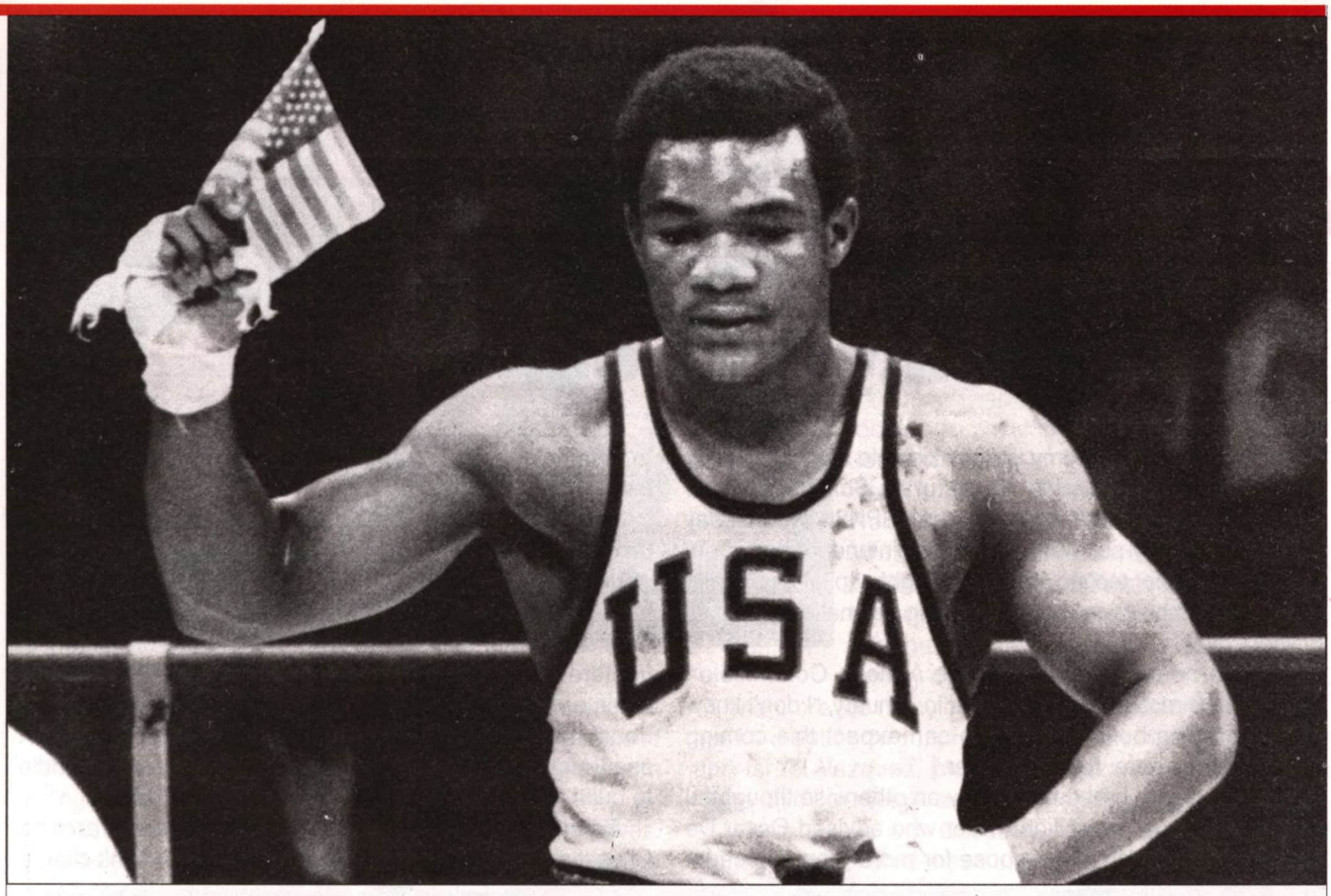
•**Howard Cosell's toupee:** You don't think it's been recycled on another baldpate, do you?

•**The Puerto Rican flag:** We're talking about the one Bernard Hopkins threw to the ground while hyping his showdown with Felix Trinidad.

•**Mike Tyson's handcuffs:** The ones he was waving at the camera so proudly when he was hauled off to the slammer in Indiana.

•**Vinny Paz' halo:** Remember that huge, head-stabilizing contraption Paz wore when he was recovering from a broken neck? If that baby ever turns up on eBay, shipping costs could be a bitch.

•**Jack Dempsey's restaurant sign:** Somewhere out there are the giant neon letters that decorated "The



Where's George's flag?

Manassa Mauler's" New York eatery for years.

•**Paulie Malignaggi's hair extensions:** Plenty of Italian girls in Brooklyn or aging rock stars would be willing to pay a lot for those things.

•**Boxing's most infamous cowbell:** Remember what passed for a ring bell during Ali's last career fight, vs. Trevor Berbick in Nassau? Presumably, it's around the neck of some Bahamian heifer these days. (No, smart alecks, I'm not referring to an out-of-shape former round-card girl.)

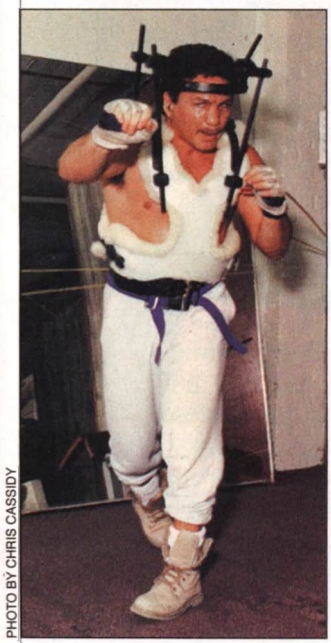


PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

Paz battles through a broken neck

•**Printed materials that predate name-dropping:** Be on the lookout for any fight posters or programs that refer to Cassius Clay, Matt Franklin, Eddie Gregory, and Dwight Braxton before they became Muhammad Ali, Matthew Saad Muhammad, Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, and Dwight Muhammad Qawi.

•**Panama Lewis' little black bottle:** That's the container that held the, *ahem*, special mixture he gave to Aaron Pryor during "The Hawk's" first fight with Alexis Arguello.

•**Floyd Patterson's disguise:** He wore a fake beard after his battering by Sonny Liston, and I'd like to find it for the next time I write a bad column. What's that? I should be wearing it now?

•**Old canvases:** The ones I'd like to have are from the Philadelphia's Spectrum and the Fabulous Forum in Inglewood, California. At one time, the two legendary venues all had their own unique building logo decorating the mat at ring center. (No Nemiroff vodka ads or Don King crowns on those playing fields.) As canvases go, they might be harder to locate than some original Picassos.

How would Ryan look in this getup?

•**Fan Man's parachute:** Rumor has it that it might be in the National Air and Space Museum. ■

By Ivan Goldman

Boxing Bobs, Weaves As Economy Hits Canvas

The broken economy isn't making life any sweeter for the Sweet Science. Telefutura's *Solo Boxeo* now shares the same graveyard as ESPN2's *Wednesday Night Fights*. Pay-per-view shows remain under attack from a new barrage of techno-piracy, and fight capital Las Vegas was rolling back prices but still coming up snake-eyes in its visitor count.

"To be honest," Nevada State Athletic Commission Executive Director Keith Kizer said in January, "I don't know how many big boxing cards we can expect this coming year. Or anywhere, for that matter."

Not long ago, I read a piece by an otherwise thoughtful but evidently panicked fight writer who advised Oscar De La Hoya, boxing's golden goose for more than a decade, to eschew retirement and keep competing, only against less able opponents.

Look, let's not get hysterical. Trouble's all around us, but there's reason for cautious optimism, mostly because of an abundance of exciting talent. I'll get to that later. In the meantime, yes, "The Golden Boy's" attracted more revenue than any fighter in history, and yes, there are still plenty of fighters he hasn't lost to yet. But let's try to show a little class around here, okay? When an athlete's done, he's done. The Bears had another bad season, but you don't see them sticking the corpse of Red Grange in the huddle to build up the gate.

Boxing always has an unofficial off-season around Christmas and the NFL playoffs, but this year it didn't charge

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Some people need no more proof that Oscar should keep fighting

PHOTO BY BRYAN CROWE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Arreola creates some heavyweight excitement

out the gate at the end of the break. It limped, sending out waves of dread around the sport. As we entered the second year of the worst financial rut in decades, good fights were being made, but not as many as we normally see.

Hit most severely by all this are the fighters themselves. A laid-off factory worker is no one to envy, but at least he doesn't have to stay on the assembly line for no pay. Fighters, naturally, must stay sharp and hit the gym even when their managers can't get them on a card.

All this was getting me down, but then I read on theringonline.com that promoter Dan Goossen was making headway putting together a match this spring for his undefeated Chris Arreola against Wladimir Klitschko. It brought me out of my funk. A terrific heavyweight fight. Now you're talking. Heck, I can't even *remember* the last time we saw one of those, unless you count the superbly crafted massacre of Samuel Peter by Wladimir's healthy-for-once brother, Vitali.

Arreola is, of course, widely considered the ablest, most promising American heavyweight. That's not saying a lot these days, and of course he's never faced an opponent nearly as formidable as Wladimir, but he has the perennial puncher's chance, and Wladimir's chin has proved vulnerable on more than one occasion. Besides, delaying the contest won't help Arreola if he keeps getting fatter. Maybe Goossen figures he better make the deal before Arreola eats the rest of Riverside, California.

Great American Hope Arreola, though his skills level off as his girth grows, looks old-school to me, a guy who takes chances and refuses to waltz even for a little while. His stablemate, the now-hard-hitting, body-killing Paul Williams, was already scaring off managers before he started sitting down on his punches. THE RING's number-one pound-for-pounder, Manny Pacquiao, looks too good to be true, except he is true. My gut tells me Ricky Hatton will take him on anyway. Hatton was born old-school.

It's hard for boxing to be healthy if you don't have formidable middleweights, but we do. Sure Kelly Pavlik got shellacked by Bernard Hopkins, but he's never lost a middleweight contest, and I'm confident we'll see him in against tough Armenian bangmaster Arthur Abraham—a matchup so excellent it needs no hype from anyone. And if Williams, who can't seem to settle on a weight class, chooses middleweight, I expect he'll find deals more accessible.

2004 Olympic gold medalist Andre Ward's looking to break into the big time against Jermain Taylor (a fight not yet made as we went to press). Observers I trust tell me Roman Gonzalez, ranked number one at strawweight, may be the best fighter out of Nicaragua since Alexis Arguello. And the welterweight division, already bulging with talent, now has to make room for Andre Berto, a hungry dynamo.

There are too many crowd-pleasing warriors to list here, but I'll mention two more names: Juan Manuel Marquez and Israel Vazquez, plus all the dazzling talent in their respective lightweight and junior featherweight divisions.

When I spoke with Goossen, he conceded that the TV money being offered these days isn't quite as lucrative as it once was for certain level fights. "I don't want to say it's all a rosy picture," he said, "but it's not a rosy picture for the

PHOTO BY KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Roman Gonzalez brings back memories of Alexis Arguello

most part for anyone out there in the United States. Good fights can still be made on existing budgets."

Goossen was still smarting over Antonio Margarito's decision to take on Shane Mosley for $2-million rather than test himself against Williams again for $4-million, but I figure Margarito was ducked by so many fighters for so long, he earned the right to look for a less beastly battle before he goes back to taking on all comers.

Goossen likened Williams to Marvelous Marvin Hagler, who also had trouble getting big fights, but not forever. "All of a sudden," predicted Goossen, "the dam will break and people will be willing to fight Paul Williams. I think we're on the verge of that."

Managers, promoters, and people from the networks and venues are circulating all the time, looking to put together good fights, and they will because they have seats to fill.

Boxing doesn't suffer alone. Arena Football canceled its 2009 season. And, in the WNBA, the Houston franchise folded up shop even after winning a third of the titles in the league's first 12 seasons.

The jury is still out on major league soccer, and the NHL, which likes to think of itself as a major sport, isn't. Under normal conditions there's usually some tycoon willing to step forward and buy a losing franchise just to get his mug in the sports section. But with real estate and Wall Street in tatters, tycoons don't feel quite as tycoony as they used to.

But the fight business doesn't rely on tycoons. It's never been subsidized by government handouts like big-time teams whose owners whine like a bad transmission when a city hesitates before building them their skyboxes. The fight business is the crafty kid from the wrong side of the tracks. It's been around the block, and when times get tough, it won't fall apart like a prep schooler whose allowance from Daddy was delayed by a banking error.

But in the interest of fairness, here are ominous trends I haven't even mentioned. Newspaper coverage, already cut to a nub, is getting downright microscopic. Big-city dailies are losing subscribers and advertisers faster than they can remove them from their computer lists. As papers and staffs get slimmer, boxing coverage takes it in the neck. I can't name one paper that still assigns a writer full-time to boxing. TV coverage is even skimpier. How do fighters gain fame if no one knows about them? Not everyone's on the Internet, and most fight sites, though their hearts might be in the right place, lack professionalism.

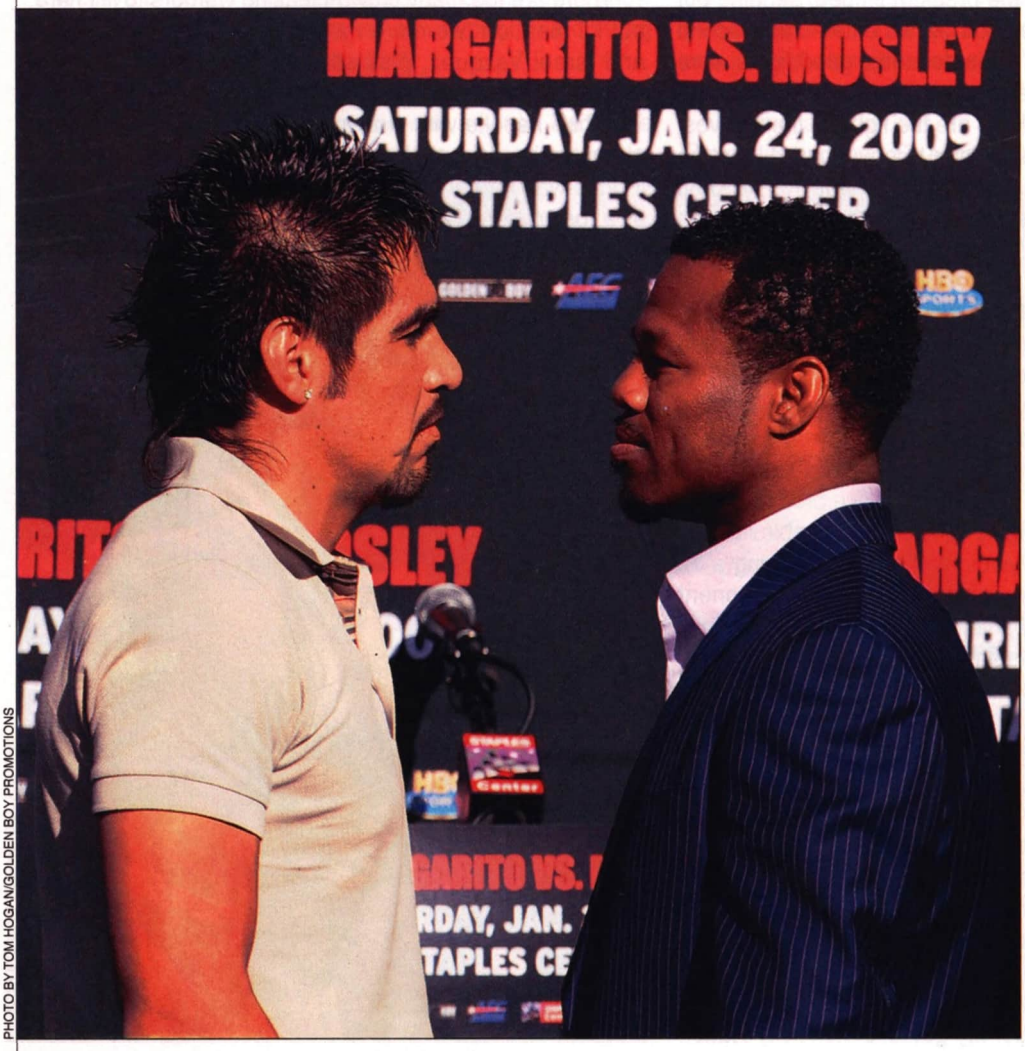


PHOTO BY TOM HOGAN/GOLDEN BOY PROMOTIONS

Margarito vs. Mosley is nice, but what about Williams?

Boxing, due to the complexity of media delivery systems, appears to be disintegrating into little city states of distribution. Some cards are on Versus, for example, which doesn't reach all cable and satellite homes and is a premium channel on some systems, meaning the local cable company demands extra payment for it. At some point fans start resisting the purchase of more premium channels. Other cards are available only through satellite. It seems like whatever you do, you get excluded by somebody.

De La Hoya-Pacquiao, now faded in the rear-view mirror, was the first mega-match to hit pay-per-view after all those banks butt into the

welfare line. Despite drawing 1.25 million buys, the fight and its mediocre undercard pulled in about 56 percent of De La Hoya-Floyd Mayweather sales. In the future, networks and promoters should go for higher volume with lower prices. It's a concept well known to retailers worldwide and why you make more money selling a lot of Toyotas than you do selling a few Ferraris.

"The Fight That Won't Die": Those are the words of *Sho-Box*'s Steve Farhood, who e-mailed me that Nevada experts Kizer and Joe Cortez told him that even though Lucian Bute had to lean against the ringpost to beat the count, referee Marlon Wright didn't necessarily have to rule a kayo for Librado Andrade. The rulebook is vague about how to call that situation in the final round, which was the case in the still-talked-about October fight between Bute and Librado in Montreal. That makes Farhood correct (though my own expert, California's Pat Russell, saw it somewhat differently). All three experts are right, too, because when the rule is this fuzzy, it's the referee's call. But Wright's Magoo stands because of his other grievous errors cited in a previous column. I still say Andrade won that fight.

The commissions should go into a huddle on this because when the situation arises, it's always crucial and boils down to this: Can a fighter knocked down in the last few seconds be considered ready to continue when he's up but wobbly? ■

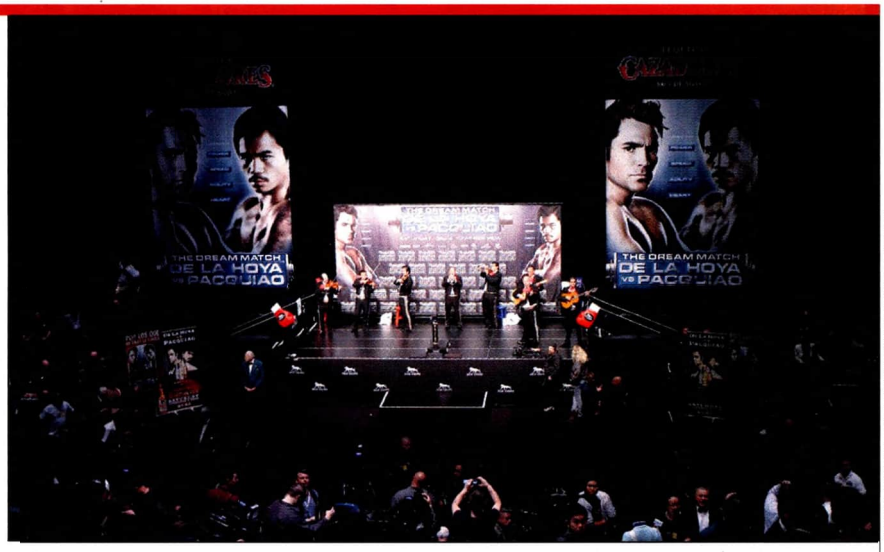


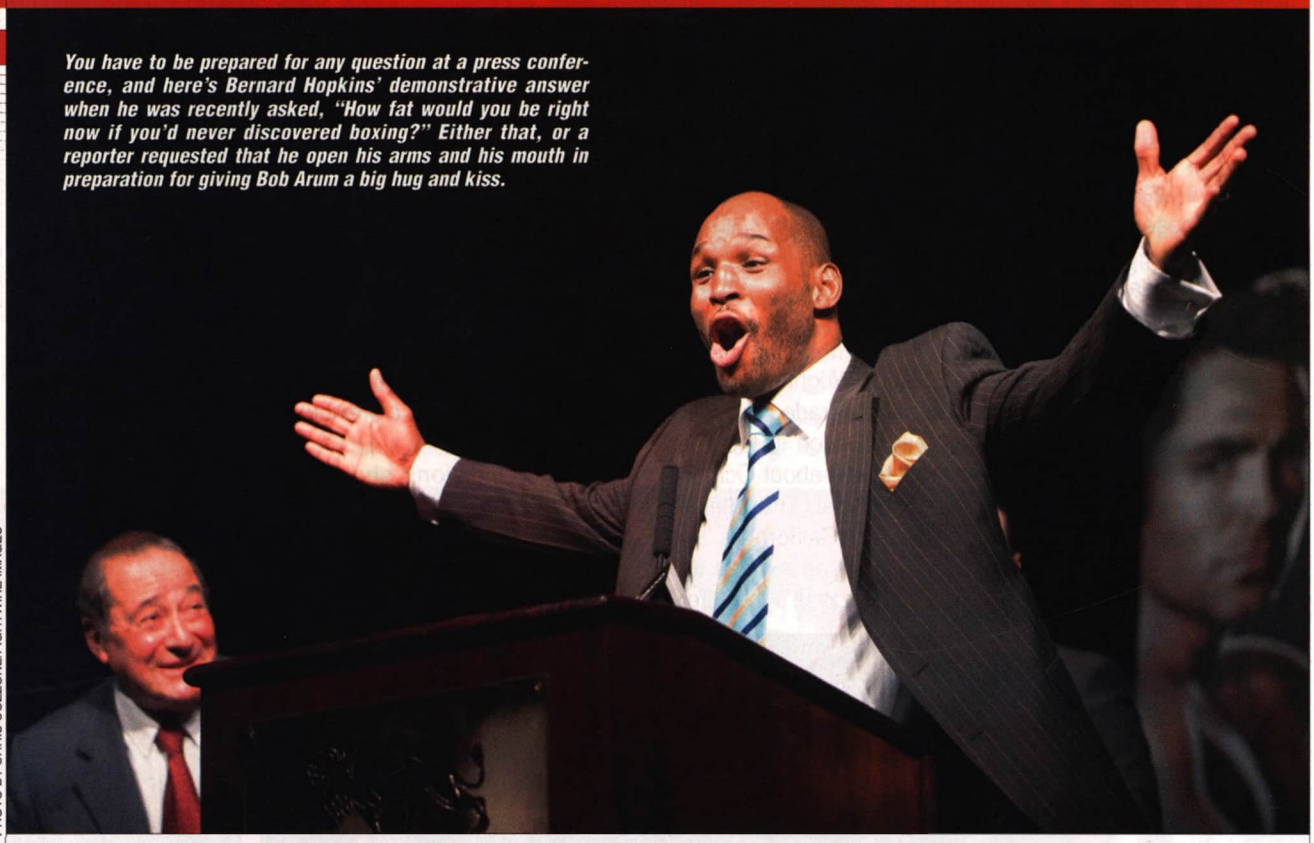
PHOTO BY TOM HOGAN/GOLDEN BOY PROMOTIONS

How many boxing beat reporters were among the media members at the Pacquiao-De La Hoya weigh-in?

PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

The conclusion of Bute vs. Andrade is still a topic for discussion

[Camera Clicks]



You have to be prepared for any question at a press conference, and here's Bernard Hopkins' demonstrative answer when he was recently asked, "How fat would you be right now if you'd never discovered boxing?" Either that, or a reporter requested that he open his arms and his mouth in preparation for giving Bob Arum a big hug and kiss.

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

A prayer circle? A rugby scrum? A group of guys gathering to search for a fallen contact lens? Steve Cunningham and his team huddled up after the cruiserweight's stirring title fight against Tomasz Adamek, presumably praying for a way judges could favor a guy who got knocked down three times.

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

PHOTO BY DWIGHT McCANN/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

ShoBox *isn't just the show that gives an opportunity to fighters you've never seen before; it's also the show that gives an opportunity to ring announcers you've never seen before, like Mike Vale, who lost his ring announcing virginity at this December fight card. Thankfully for Vale, he didn't have to go it alone. His shadow was right there behind him … and so was his other shadow … and his other shadow.*

PHOTO BY DWIGHT McCANN/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Ladies and gentlemen, the world's most uncomfortably connected conjoined twins! Anthony Dirrell, whose head is in there somewhere behind opponent Bobby Kliewer's leg, is trying to separate himself from the prospect pack, if not actually from a Siamese twin, and he took strides toward that goal with an easy second-round TKO of Kliewer in Santa Ynez, California, in December.

PHOTO BY DWIGHT McCANN/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

There's just one thing to say when you see the round-card girls at the Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez: I wish they all could be California girls. This quartet definitely makes you root for fights not to end in the first round.

By Scott Mallon

Saddam Kietyongyuth Junior Welterweight

As the sun shone brightly over the crystal blue waters of the Gulf of Thailand, music blared, children played in a nearby park, food vendors leisurely attended to their stalls, and a boxing ring rested upon a small patch of the 300-yard stretch of white sand. The setting looked more *Baywatch* than boxing, but more than 1,200 fans crowded the beach to watch Thailand's newest star, Saddam Kietyongyuth, demolish Manny Pacquiao victim Serikzhan Yeshmagambetov in five brutal rounds.

The powerpunching dynamo took the first two rounds to warm up and then battered the Kazakhstan fighter in the subsequent rounds, forcing a fifth-round stoppage. Kietyongyuth, whose real name is Narong Boonchan, took a few more punches than he should have, but walked through them unscathed.

After the bout, Kietyongyuth and his promoter, Daniel Potter, stood in the ring alongside one another, surrounded by sponsors, city employees, media, and just about anyone else who believes they belonged. The duo basked in the limelight, engaging in the ring rigmarole that always follows main events in Thailand. Handshakes and smiles were continual, hundreds of photos were taken in a matter of seconds, one sponsor after another presented their best face for the camera, and VIPs were each given a brief moment to issue their congratulations.

Although Yeshmagambetov, 20-12-1 (10) had been out of action for 15 months and at 36 was well past his prime, the victory was sweet nonetheless.

"It took me longer than I expected to get going and I felt slow," said the 25-year-old Kietyongyuth. "I think I could have fought better, but this guy was tough and I'm happy to get the win."

Kietyongyuth had passed yet another test in his many years of schooling, this time against an experienced journeyman. Two fights previous, Kietyongyuth stopped Jimrex Jaca, the Filipino who gave Juan Manuel Marquez a tough fight, in just two rounds. He is tentatively scheduled to travel to Manila in March to face hard-hitting Filipino Randy Suico, 28-4-1 (24), in a bout that is unlikely to go the full 12 rounds.

"This kid's got bricks for fists and he's continually improving," said Potter. "He needs a little fine-tuning, but I'm confident he can hold his own against anyone. He's a polite young man, but inside the ring he's got mongrel in him, a real vicious streak. Once he hurts you, it's over."

The promoter tried for months, unsuccessfully, to get a fight with Suico, but after the Filipino's loss to Ichitaro Ishii in Japan, the phone rang and there's now a good chance the fight will happen.

Fighting is what Kietyongyuth knows best, having begun his professional fighting career at the age of nine. He racked up more than 200 Muay Thai bouts, winning all but 30, and, in his own words, scored "a lot of knockouts."

"My father fought 10, 15 times," said Kietyongyuth. "He must have seen something in me, because he was always pushing me to fight. Somehow he knew I had it in me to be a fighter."

Kietyongyuth fought locally in small village shows until the age of 11, when he took the next step in his journey, moving from his hometown of Krabi in the south of Thailand to the

(Continued on Page 112)

Pro Record

2004		
May 5	Munukifi Suiva, Payao Province, Thai.	KO 1
June 24	Jesus Singwancha, Sawee, Thailand	KO 2
Aug. 11	Ali Matumla, Bangkok, Thailand	KO 4
Oct. 15	Rud 4K Kevkatche, Bangkok	W 12
Dec. 24	Renato Inal, Bangkok	KO 4
2005		
March 4	Larry Pelonia, Pathum Thani, Thailand	KO 5
April 28	Jesus Singwancha, Pathum Thani	W 6
June 17	Arex Montalban, Tachalorm, Thailand	KO 2
2006		
Feb. 23	Monte Carlos, Tachalorm	W 6
April 13	Richard Sandikal, Pathum Thani	KO 1
Sept. 25	Arniel Tinampay, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand	W 12
2007		
Jan. 26	Monte Carlos, Samut Sakhon, Thailand	KO 2
April 13	Jury Noda, Pathum Thani	KO 3
2008		
Jan. 26	Aleksander Bajawa, Jakarta, Indonesia	KO 5
June 27	J. R. Sollano, Pattaya, Thailand	KO 1
Oct. 22	Jimrex Jaca, Nonthaburi, Thailand	KO 2
Dec. 19	Serikzhan Yeshmagambetov, Surat Thani, Thailand	KO 5

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
17	17	0	0	13

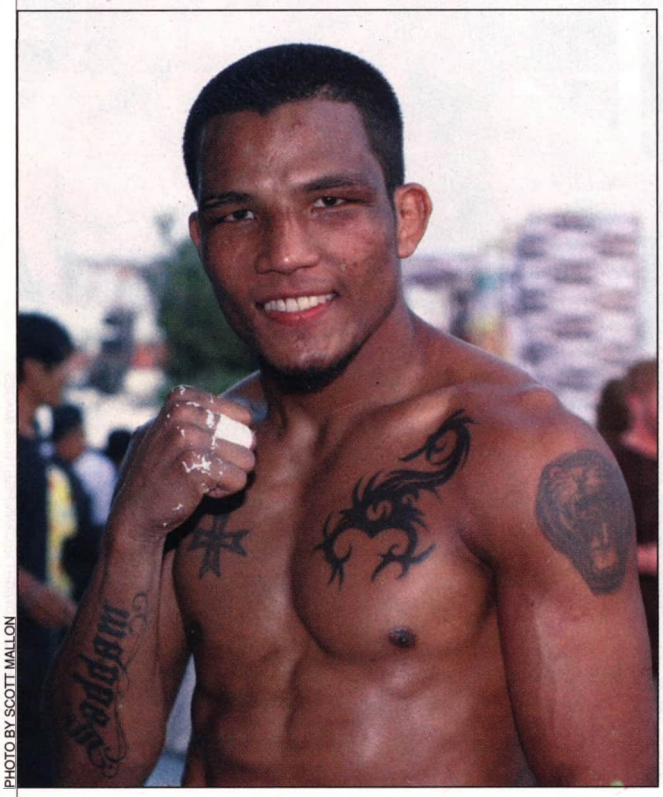
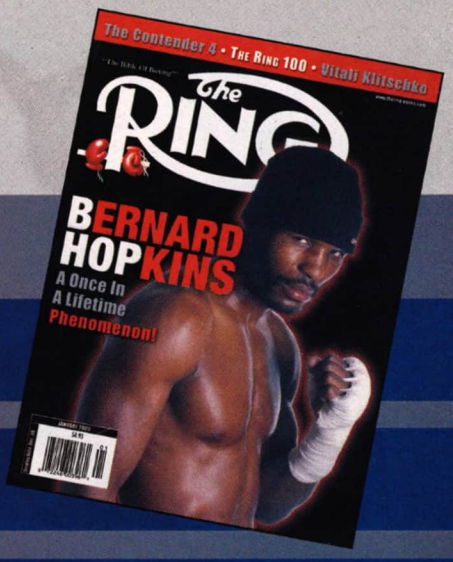


PHOTO BY SCOTT MALLON

The RING



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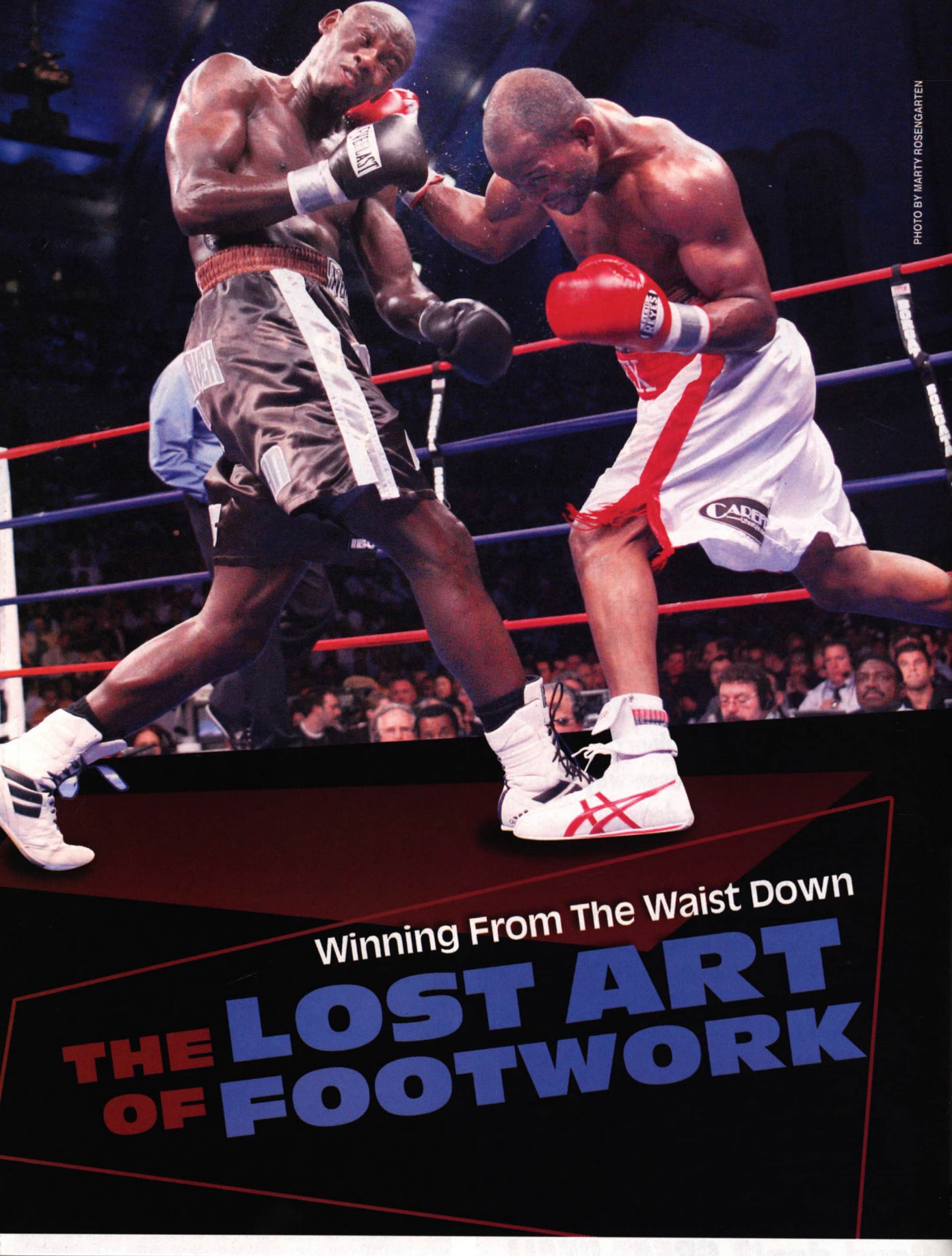


PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Winning From The Waist Down

THE LOST ART OF FOOTWORK

PHOTO BY JEWEL SAMAD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

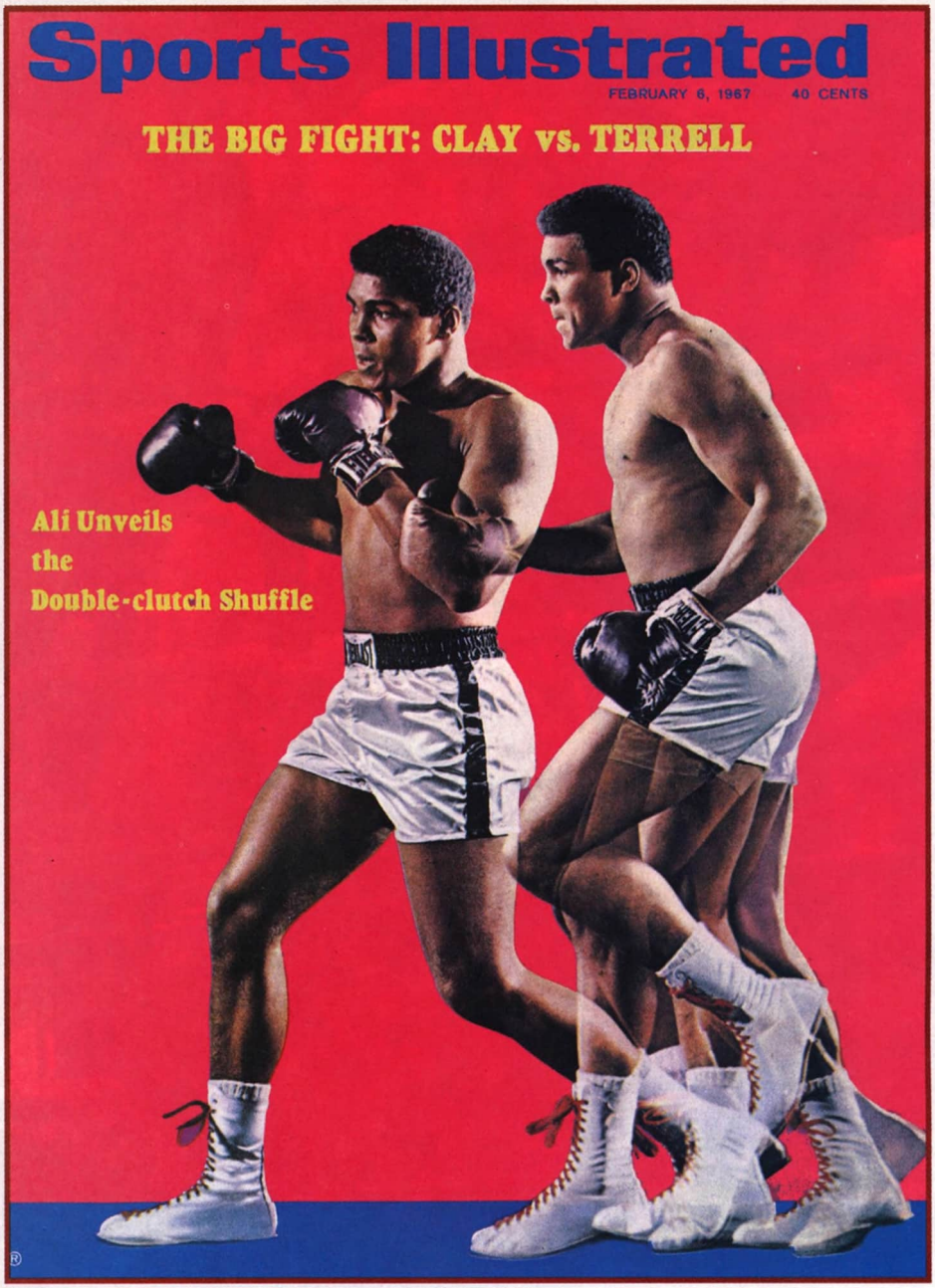
Bernard Hopkins demonstrates perfect form against southpaw Antonio Tarver (opposite page). Note that B-Hop's left foot is outside of Tarver's, and that most of Hopkins' body weight shifts to the lead foot on the moment of impact. Manny Pacquiao had notoriously poor balance when he first began fighting in the U.S., but against Oscar De La Hoya (above), Pac-Man dominated, thanks in large part to his vastly improved footwork that has resulted from his work with Freddie Roach.

By Nigel Collins

If Oscar De La Hoya or any member of his training team had watched Manny Pacquiao warming up prior to their fight, they would have known exactly what was in store for "The Golden Boy" once the opening bell rang.

Moreover, they didn't need a mole in Manny's dressing room to know what Pacquiao and trainer Freddie Roach had in mind. All they had to do was watch HBO's broadcast or look at the giant screens inside of the MGM Grand Garden Arena. There was Pacquiao and Roach practicing the signature move that would carry the Filipino to an upset victory by largely nullifying De La Hoya's biggest weapon, his concussive left hook.

Pacquiao would step in quickly, deliver a rapid combination to the pads Roach was holding, pivot to his right, bend at the knees, and duck low. He did it in training camp, he did it in the dressing room, and most



Muhammad Ali demonstrates his famous shuffle for the cover of the February 6, 1967, issue of* Sports Illustrated*. Even though his footwork was unorthodox, Ali did draw attention to the fact that fighters used more than just their fists to win.

importantly, he did it when the fight began. All night long.

"We developed that move especially to take away Oscar's bread-and-butter punch and worked on it throughout camp," said Roach. "Footwork is something of a lost art, but it was the key to Manny's victory over Oscar."

Less than two months prior to Pacquiao's shocking domination of De La Hoya, Bernard Hopkins scored an even bigger upset when he handed middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik the first loss of his career in a non-title bout. As with Pacquiao-De La Hoya, well-considered footwork played a major role in determining the outcome, a fact the 44-year-old boxing master is quick to endorse.

"The three most important things in boxing are position, position, and position," Hopkins told THE RING. "It's all about footwork—footwork and balance. They go together. Overall, I'd say that 70 to 80 percent of winning a fight is positioning. If you don't understand that, you'll never be a great fighter."

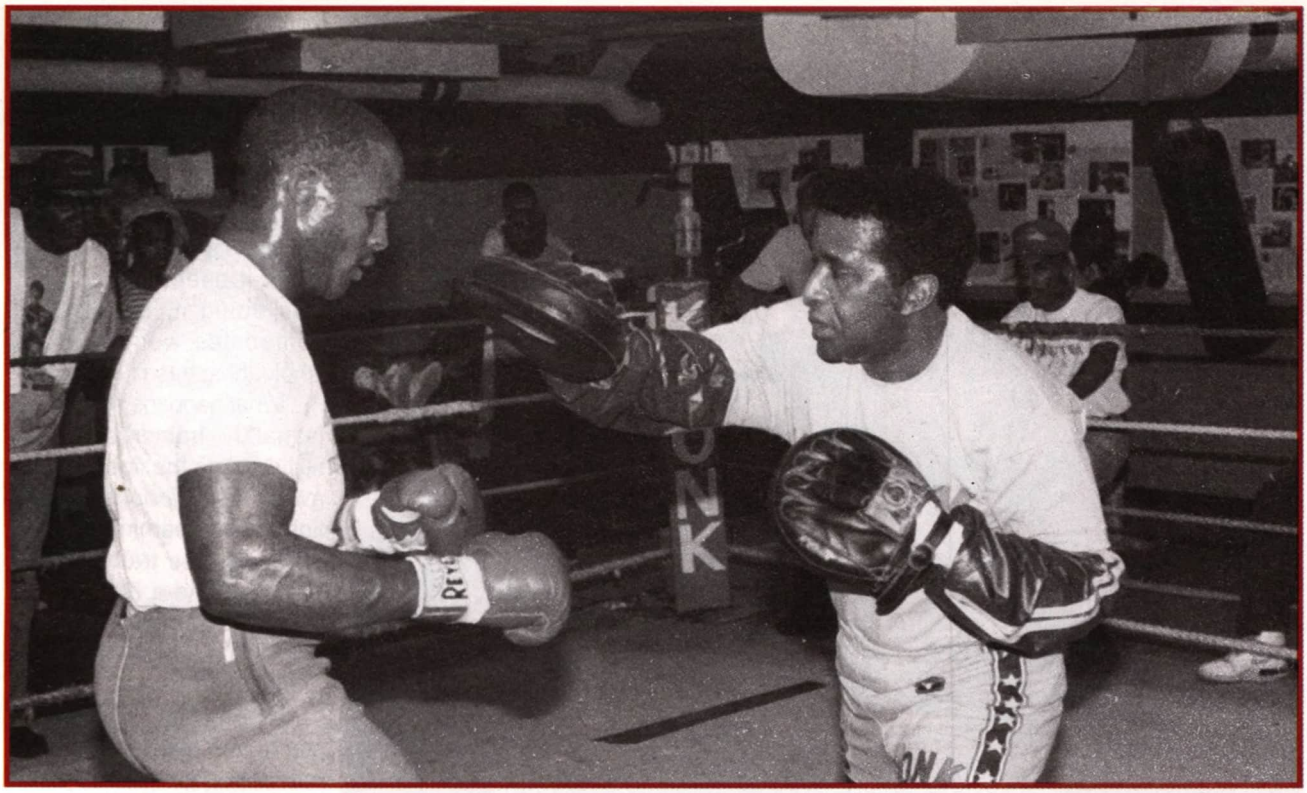
An almost lifelong student of all things boxing, Hopkins didn't even have to study tapes of Pavlik to figure out a way to beat him, which was one of the main reasons he was so eager to take a fight most so-called experts thought he couldn't win.

"Kelly is a flatfooted fighter," said Hopkins. "He wants to dig in with his feet and punch. I knew I had to be close but far away at the same time. That meant spinning and turning him, get in, score, and get out. That fight was so easy, my main problem was that I had to keep reminding myself to stick to the game plan and not get carried away and make a mistake."

Whether or not Pavlik will learn from his painful lesson remains to be seen. Some fighters do and some do not. One that did was former WBA light heavyweight titleholder Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, now one of the sport's brightest trainers. Eddie was known as a classy, thinking boxer, capable of knocking an opponent dizzy with one or two well-placed punches. But he didn't start out that way. Before Mustafa Muhammad converted to Islam and changed his name, he was Eddie "The Flame" Gregory, a powerpunching middleweight who tried to live up to his nickname. Then, in his 12th pro fight, he got a wakeup call that changed the way he thought about his craft.

"Mario Rosa had the best footwork of anybody I ever fought," recalled Mustafa Muhammad, who tangled with the New Jersey southpaw at the Felt Forum in New York back in November 1974. "He gave me so many angles, I couldn't hit him. He knocked me down in the sixth and seventh rounds, before I finally caught up with him and stopped him in the eighth."

Certain fighters, Muhammad Ali, during his float-like-a-butterfly days,



Emanuel Steward gives Michael Moorer a moving target during a workout with the pads at the Kronk Gym. Steward believes that many trainers fail to utilize the pad work correctly, negating much of its original intent.

Willie Pep's footwork was so sublime, many people believed the myth that he won the third round of his 1946 bout with Jackie Graves without throwing a punch.

and Willie Pep, the phantom-like "Will O' The Wisp," were famous for their fancy footwork. There are plenty of others, but Ali and Pep are the most obvious and famous examples. Generally speaking, however, you don't hear or read a lot about footwork, not on TV, not on-line, and not in the few remaining newspapers that cover boxing. So if footwork is so damned crucial, how come hardly anybody is talking about it?

"Things have changed over the years," said Hopkins. "People get caught up in the brutality of boxing, the swollen faces and busted lips. Everybody is so busy watching what is going on upstairs, they forget footwork.

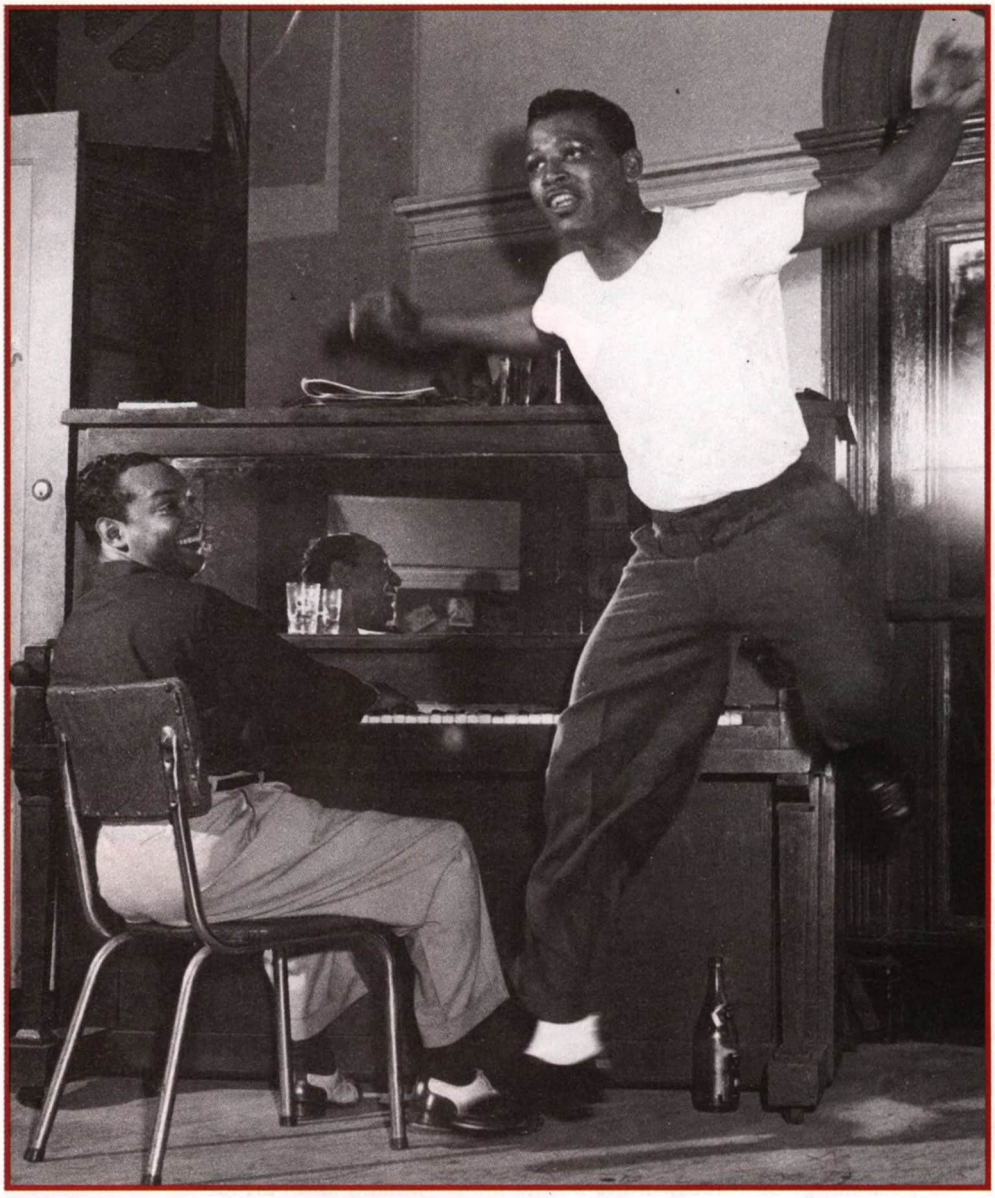
"In a way it's like bodypunching. The TV announcers always make a big deal of it when somebody gets knocked out with a bodyshot. Back in the day, people didn't think anything of it when Bennie Briscoe came out of his corner, walked the other guy into the ropes, and went to the body. It was normal. Not anymore."

It is not, however, simply a matter of public perception. These days you don't see trainers tying a boxer's ankles together with a short piece of rope like Mickey did to Rocky. That sort of old-school technique isn't a product of Hollywood, it is one of hundreds of time-tested practices that are gradually disappearing as fewer and fewer wise old-heads are left to pass on the knowledge than can raise boxing to an art form.

But as Mustafa Muhammad, who learned footwork from Chickie Ferrara (the guy who showed Angelo Dundee the ropes), has discovered, not all of today's *SportsCenter*-generation fighters are willing pupils.

"Everybody wants to be King Kong," he said. "They want to be a knockout puncher, so you have to break it down for them and explain that when you fight up on the balls of your feet, you have more leverage and snap on your punches."

Not that there's anything the matter with wanting to be King Kong. It's absolutely the correct attitude for a fighter. It's a question of how best to go about it, and even if you're an uncoordinated slugger with two left



Sugar Ray Robinson's footwork was so slick that he quit boxing to become a song-and-dance man after failing to win the light heavyweight title from Joey Maxim in 1952. But when the nightclub gigs dried up, he went back to using his dazzling footwork in the ring.

feet, it's still a big help to understand the principles of distance and angles.

Don't for a moment think that footwork is the sole preserve of the light-footed dancing master. Knowing how to move around the ring is just as important to the behemoths of the ring as everybody else. Even the ability to execute a few rudimentary moves can elevate them above the lumbering class.

"Most heavyweights have a lot of trouble hitting Vitali Klitschko," said Hall of Fame trainer Emanuel Steward, "and it's not just because he's so tall. Fighters just can't find their rhythm against him. Vitali makes little moves to his left or right that throws off their timing. There's an element in his game they aren't prepared for, and it's his footwork."

Steward is largely responsible for the recent epidemic of pad work, the popularity of which has spread beyond the boxing gym into every yuppie gym on the planet featuring a boxing-style workout. Some form of pads or mitts (as they are also called) has been around since trainers discovered that catching a punch from a professional prizefighter in the palm of your hand hurts like hell.

But it was Steward, at the height of his Kronk glory years, who was the first well-known trainer to make pad work a key component of his fighters' workouts. It was flashy looking, fun for the fighters, and clearly presented a more realistic target than a punching bag. Soon it seemed everybody was doing it. But Steward sometimes wonders if the whole thing hasn't backfired.

"What happens a lot of time is that the trainer just stands still and lets the fighters bang away—*pop, pop, pop!* The fighter isn't learning anything that way. The trainer has to move around a bit. A fighter has learn how to move, punch, and maintain his balance, all at the same time."

Overlooked, misunderstood, and difficult to master, footwork (and its co-joined twin, balance) has always been and remains the hallmark of the great fighters down through the generations. Among the iconic heavyweights, Jim Corbett, Jack Johnson, Gene Tunney, Jersey Joe Walcott, Ali, and Larry Holmes were all gifted hoofers.

Savvy movement also played a major role in the success of fighters not normally associated with fancy legwork. Just watch a prime Joe Frazier or Mike Tyson, or, better yet, Roberto Duran, cut off the ring and you'll see a prime example. Even Joe Louis' shuffle got him where he was going, balanced and in position to unload a pair of hands that moved considerably quicker than his feet.

Still, it is the flashy boxers, not sluggers, who leap immediately to mind on the rare occasions the subject arises outside of the culture of the gym. Even there, it is the iconic legmen who are most keenly admired.

"Sugar Ray Robinson and Sugar Ray Leonard both had great footwork," said Hopkins. "Movement can even give a great fighter problems. Mar-

Boxing's version of musical chairs: Footwork was so important to Ray Leonard that he practiced by maneuvering around chairs set up in the ring.

velous Marvin Hagler punished everyone he fought, but he had trouble with movers like Boogaloo Watts and Willie 'The Worm' Monroe when he first came to Philly. He came back and beat them. And regardless of what you think of the decision, he also had trouble with Leonard when Ray was past his prime."

It's no accident that the first four names on THE RING's current pound-for-pound ratings—Pacquiao, Juan Manuel Marquez, Joe Calzaghe, Hopkins—belong to fighters who have reaped the benefits of employing intelligent footwork. And let's not forget Floyd Mayweather, the exiled prince whose self-imposed and seemingly premature retirement has, at least temporarily, deprived us of one of our era's finest practitioner of footwork.

A bit further down the P-4-P list is junior flyweight world champion Ivan Calderon, a fervent advocate of footwork if ever there was one. Undefeated in 32 professional bouts, the curiously named "Iron Boy" has tallied just six knockouts. With a power shortage of that severity, you'd better be light on your feet and know where you want them to take you.

It's been a long journey from the first stirrings of science among the bare-knuckle prizefighters of the 18th and 19th century, to the sleek, multitasking athletes who populate the uppermost plateau of today's game. But the footwork has always been the shifting foundation upon which boxing excellence is built.

The first boxing book, *A Treatise Upon The Useful Science Of Defense*, published in 1747, was written by Captain John Godfrey, an expert swordfighter, who, like many among the British establishment, supported boxing as a relatively safe alternative to dueling.

"Boxing is a combat, depending more on strength than the sword: But art will yet bear down the beam against it," wrote Godfrey. "Strength certainly is what a boxer ought to set out with, but without art he will succeed but poorly."

Throughout the chapters on both swordfighting and boxing, Godfrey stresses the importance of "time" and "distance." And although Pacquiao, Hopkins, and the various other boxers and trainers mentioned here have probably never heard of the old soldier or his book, they are all enthusiastic disciples of the message Godfrey preached—simple facts of geometry that still ring true more than 250 years later. ■

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BATTLE OF THE LEGENDS

Today's Best VS. The Best Of The Past Generation

By William Dettloff

There is no sport that lends itself so readily to the boundless exercise of dream matchups as boxing. If you have the time and energy you can ponder all day whether the 1927 Yankees would have beaten the great 1978 version of the same team, or how Joe Namath's Jets would have done against Eli Manning's New York Giants.

But who's got that much time and energy? Besides, there are so many variables in team sports, and when a team can lose 60 times in a season and still be the best of the year, it weakens the argument for historical greatness.

In boxing here is no such quandary. Two men, straight up: Who would win? It's a very basic and simple proposition and there's nothing lovers of the Sweet Science like more than simplicity.

In this special section, THE RING reprises its "Battle Of The Legend" series, which used to be a monthly staple featuring a dream match between fighters from different eras whose winner would be chosen by a panel of experts after much thoughtful analysis and discussion.

This time we've made 10 matches featuring today's best fighters squaring off against the best fighters of the 1970s and '80s. We think you'll like the matches we've put together, but there is a rule you must know going in: Today's fighters are judged as they exist today, in 2009, not necessarily when they were at their peak. For example, in Bernard Hopkins' match, he is a 44-year-old light heavyweight professor, not a twentysomething middleweight killer. That matters, as you will see.

The panel represents an interesting mix of perspective and experience. It is comprised of HBO boxing analyst and former ESPN2 *Friday Night Fights* analyst Max Kellerman; world-class trainer Ronnie Shields, who has worked with, among others, Evander Holyfield, Mike Tyson, Meldrick Taylor, Pernell Whitaker, and David Tua, and who currently trains top-rated lightweight Juan Diaz; and loquacious former WBC featherweight titleholder and 70-fight pro veteran Kevin Kelley.

We're certain you'll find that together the panelists provide compelling, interesting, and insightful answers to the questions these fights ask, and that although you may disagree with some of their conclusions, they were arrived at with considerable thought. There was no coin tossing.

Let the debates begin!

Ukraine
Career: 1996-2004; 2008-present
36-2 (35)

Vitali Klitschko vs.

We thought we'd seen the last of Klitschko when he announced his retirement in 2005 following several injury-related postponements of a title defense against Hasim Rahman. Furthermore, his permanent departure was made to seem very likely by the political aspirations he held in relation to his home country of Ukraine.

It had been a solid ride: A silver medal in the World Amateur Championships in Berlin in 1995, an unfettered knockout spree through the dregs of the heavyweight division, and a brief reign as the world heavyweight champion. There had been bad spots: the losses to Chris Byrd and Lennox Lewis, namely, but the manner in which he lost the latter made us forgive the way he lost the former.

That Klitschko came back and completely outclassed Sam Peter to win an alphabet title in October 2008, with benefit of neither a tune-up nor a younger man's body, was remarkable. He'd retained all of the tools of his youth: great size, skills, punch, intractable awkwardness, and a winner's confidence. At this writing THE RING ranks him second at heavyweight.

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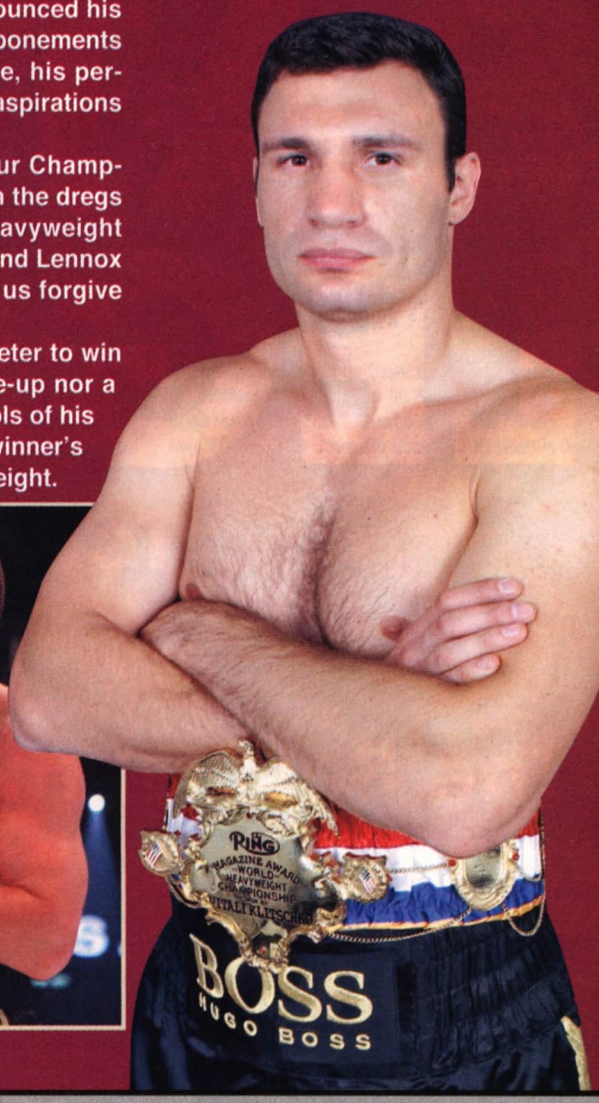
Klitschko easily overcame ring rust and Peter



Max Kellerman

It's so tempting to say Klitschko because they're really fighting in different weight divisions. In his prime Holmes was about 210, 212 pounds, give or take. The size difference between Holmes and Klitschko is 30 or 40 pounds. Klitschko has three or four inches in height, has a little in reach, has him substantially in weight, and Klitschko has a very awkward approach that's effective. He manages to avoid punches in that straight-up Eastern European style, and American fighters find it confusing.

Also, when you think about Gerry Cooney giving Holmes a real tough fight for 13 rounds, Klitschko is taller than Cooney, he has a longer reach than Cooney, a deeper amateur background than Cooney, and I'd say he's as a good a puncher as Cooney, and a better boxer, with a better jab.

So it's very tempting to say Klitschko, but in the end, I just can't do it. I think Holmes would be a little too fluid and a little too mobile, and had so much heart that he would figure out a way to stop Klitschko late or outpoint him in a very tough, very close fight. ■

Kevin Kelley

Larry Holmes was another version of Muhammad Ali, just built a little differently. He had a great right hand, a great jab. He knocked a lot of guys out when he was young, and even when he got older he beat Ray Mercer. And Mercer is the closest thing to Klitschko. Mercer could punch, he was strong, powerful, like Klitschko.

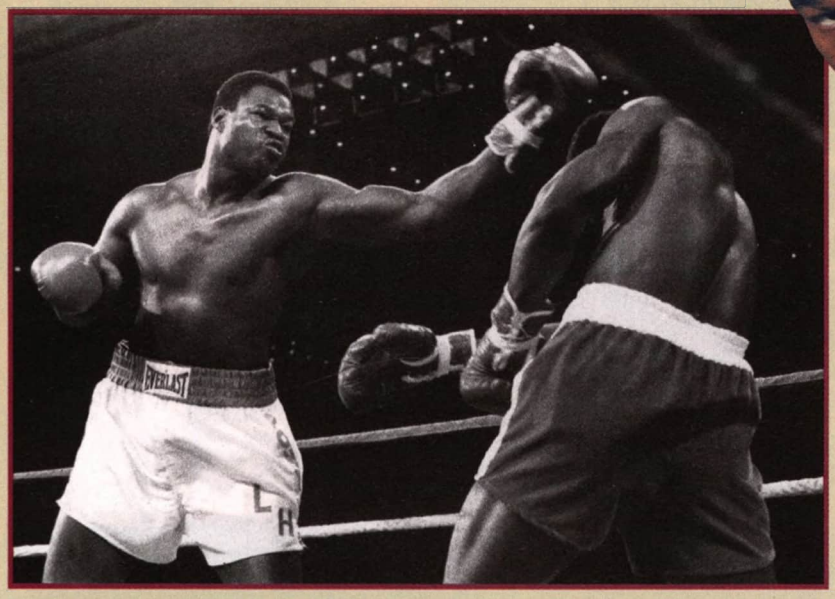
Klitschko has better punching power, but guess what—if you can't get your power there, you can't beat the man. The one thing Klitschko lacks is defense. Big defensive problem.

Larry Holmes

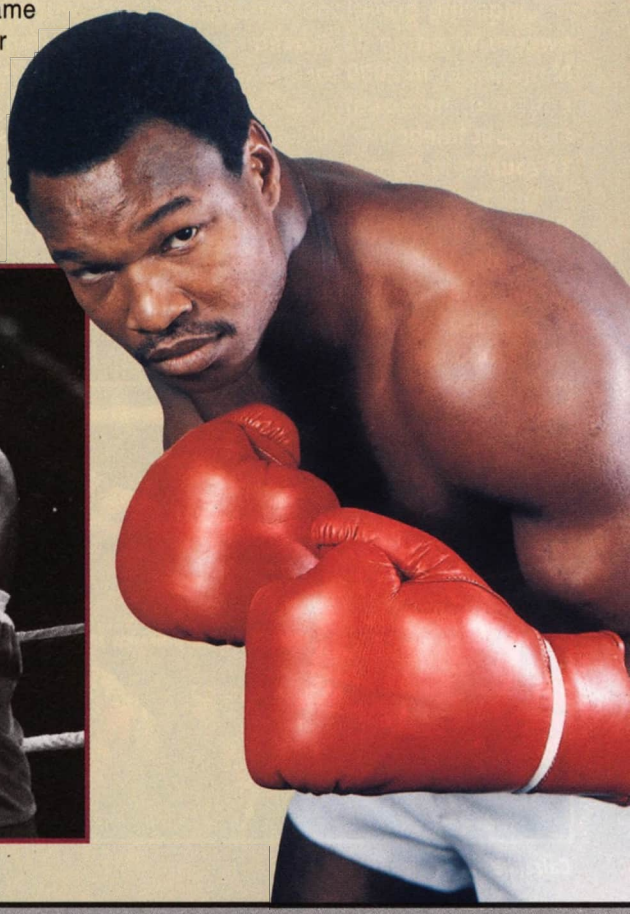
Easton, Pennsylvania
Career: 1973-1988; 1991-2002
69-6 (44)

You couldn't blame Holmes for carrying a chip on his shoulder throughout his professional life given that his era, the one he dominated, followed the one that gave us Ali, Foreman, Frazier, Norton, Quarry, et al. In the end he did better than most of them: 20 title defenses (second only to Joe Louis), over a seven-year reign, the first as the WBC heavyweight titleholder, from 1978 to '83, and then, from 1984 to '85, the IBF titlist.

Holmes wasn't inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame until 2008, but it wasn't because he lacked credentials. After retiring in 1988 following a knockout loss to Mike Tyson, he came back in 1991 and although he failed to regain the title, he scored a huge upset over highly ranked Ray Mercer in 1992, and made respectable showings in title fight losses to Evander Holyfield and Oliver McCall. His final fight was a 10-round decision over Eric "Butterbean" Esch in 2002 when Holmes was 53 years old.



Holmes jabs at Ossie Ocasio en route to TKO victory



Ronnie Shields

Larry Holmes was a very busy heavyweight. He wasn't a guy who came out and tried to look pretty and just try to dodge punches and land counterpunches. He was a guy who, as soon as the first bell rang, was going to come out and use that powerful jab against you. And he was fast. And against Holmes, guys had to get out of the way not of just one or two jabs, but sometimes three or four jabs in a row. And then when he would land that right hand on you, he would hurt you.

Klitschko is taller than Holmes and stronger and awkward, but Holmes had the better jab. Klitschko has a great chin. I think Lennox Lewis showed in his fight with Klitschko that if you can land the jab on him, you can land the right hand. And with Klitschko, if you hit him on the chin and hurt him, he's not going to come forward as much anymore; he's going to back up and keep backing up. I think Holmes would cut him up with the jab and win a decision. ■

The thing is he's so much bigger than most men that they can't hit him anyway. But what's going to happen when he fights a guy that's almost his height, with a great jab, who can hit him?

Holmes kayos Klitschko. He's too schooled, he got too much experience from all those years of training with Muhammad Ali. Klitschko never gets past the jab; he wouldn't be able to handle it, he wouldn't have the defense for it, and therefore he'd get knocked out with a right hand. ■

Newbridge, Wales
Career: 1993-present
46-0 (32)

Joe Calzaghe vs.

Born in London but a product of Newbridge, Wales, Calzaghe finally enjoys universal acclaim as one the world's best prizefighters. Fighting exclusively in Britain, as a younger fighter Calzaghe faced a mixture of bland European competition and older American retreads. Wins over once-stalwart super middleweights Chris Eubank and Robin Reid provided little indication of his future conquest of American shores.

Lingering questions about Calzaghe's worth were largely answered when he destroyed top-rated 168-pounder Jeff Lacy in Manchester in 2006 for the world super middleweight title. Not satisfied, he sought out a meeting with the excellent Dane alphabet titleholder Mikkel Kessler and beat him soundly over 12 rounds in Cardiff, Wales.

Subsequent decision wins over aging legends Bernard Hopkins (for the light heavyweight world title) and Roy Jones catapulted Calzaghe to the upper strata of the pound-for pound ratings. A quick-handed, indefatigable, and mentally strong southpaw, Calzaghe is generally viewed as the best 168-pound fighter in the division's 25-year history.

PHOTO BY ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

Calzaghe pops B-Hop in the nose

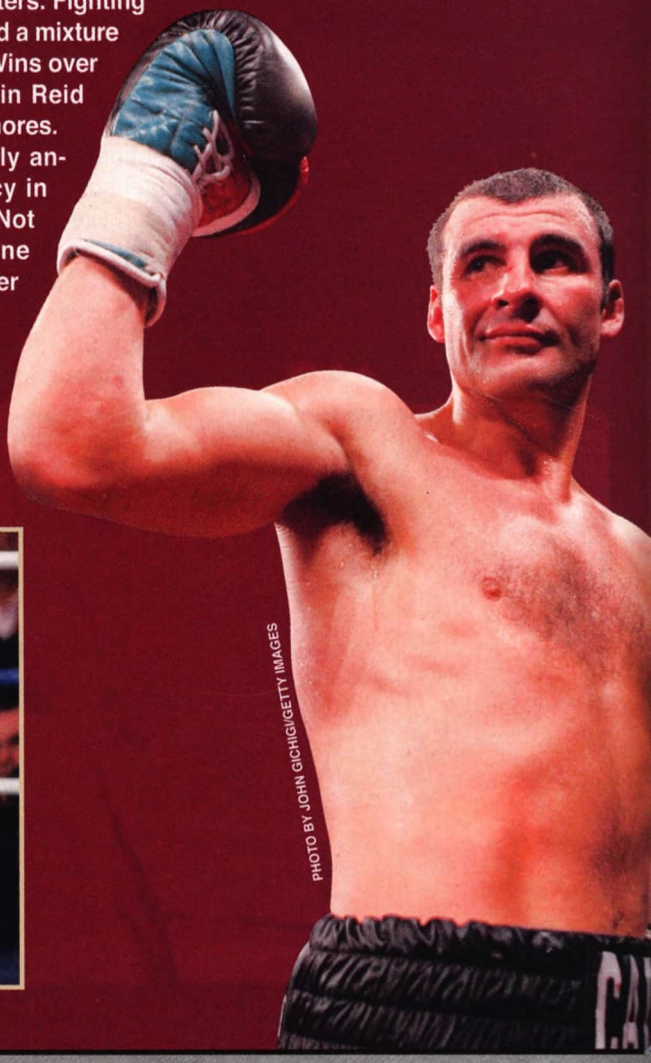


PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Max Kellerman

Spinks was a powerpunching light heavyweight and a good boxer who used his height and reach very well at light heavyweight. And he was really an exceptionally devastating puncher with both hands at 175.

Spinks was a tough combination, a 6'2" light heavyweight with good boxing skills and a deep amateur background and one-punch power with either hand. That's tough to beat. But one of the ways you can beat it is with a really special, volume-punching, mobile fighter.

Something tells me Calzaghes just special enough to outhustle Spinks over a 12-round fight. I don't think Spinks was quick enough to land his heavy artillery on Calzaghe; if he could, he'd win the fight. But I don't know that he could. I kind of see Calzaghe upsetting Spinks the same way Spinks upset Larry Holmes: a naturally smaller man outworking the bigger man in close. I see Calzaghe doing just enough to win a close fight on points. ■

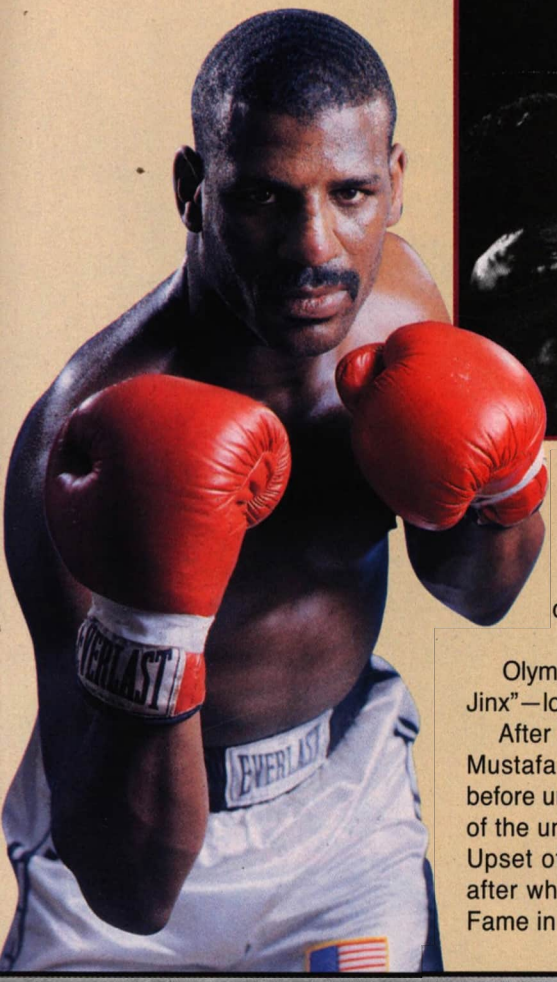
Kevin Kelley

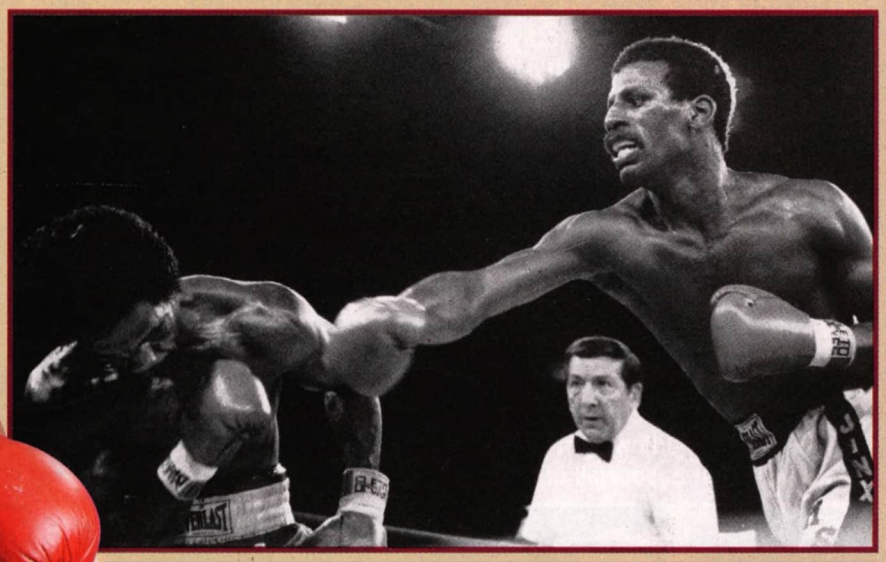
Michael Spinks had a very long jab, great height, great reach, and knew how to use it. And he had a phenomenal right hand. He could take you out with one shot. People forget he had a great hook also. He was an all-around legendary fighter. His credibility is incredible.

Calzaghe has fought mostly in Europe against sub-par opposition. He's a European fighter who fights a little better than most European fighters. He relies on work rate, not so much technical boxing skill. His

Michael Spinks

St. Louis, Missouri
Career: 1977-1988
31-1 (21)





Eddie Davis samples the famous "Spinks Jinx"

Spinks' 1985 win over Larry Holmes made him the first light heavyweight champion ever to win the heavyweight crown, but the gold medal winner and younger brother of former heavyweight champion Leon Spinks built his Hall of Fame career at 175 pounds.

After winning the gold at middleweight on the storied 1976 United States Olympic team, Spinks turned his pulverizing right cross—the so-called "Spinks Jinx"—loose on what was likely the deepest light heavyweight division ever.

After tearing through a roster of solid contenders, Spinks decisioned Eddie Mustafa Muhammad to win the WBA crown in 1981. He defended five times before unifying the title with a win over Dwight Muhammad Qawi. Four defenses of the unified title followed before the win over Holmes, which was THE RING's Upset of the Year. Spinks' only loss was by first-round kayo to Mike Tyson, after which he retired. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1994.

defense is not so much his criterion; his criterion is offense. He hits you so many times that you can't hit him. It's workload, workload, workload. And he's a southpaw on top of it.

Calzaghe was dropped in the first round by right hands from Roy Jones and Bernard Hopkins. He would never recover from a right hand from Michael Spinks early in a fight like that. Calzaghe is a great fighter today. But I don't think he would survive the light heavyweight division of the '80s. Spinks by kayo. ■

Ronnie Shields

This would have been a good fight. I traveled a lot with Spinks in the amateurs and knew him well. He had that great right hand, the Spinks Jinx, and was very tall with a long reach.

Joe Calzaghe is one of these fighters who puts a lot of pressure on you when he has to. And he has a really good chin. But look at his fight with Bernard Hopkins. In the first round Bernard hit him with a right and dropped him. Michael Spinks was much taller and had a lot of range, and if Spinks hit Calzaghe with the right hand the way Bernard did, he would have hurt him and hurt him bad.

Spinks wasn't that mobile and Calzaghe is fast, but he just wouldn't be strong enough for Spinks. He's mobile, but you can hit him with the straight right all night. I think Spinks would have hurt him in every round, dropped him at least twice in the later rounds, and won a unanimous decision. ■

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Career: 1988-present
49-5 (32)

Bernard Hopkins vs.

The appearance of a 44-year-old fighter on the pound-for-pound list is unprecedented, but only because such lists, official ones anyway, didn't exist when Archie Moore was fighting. Still, that one is required to invoke "Ageless Archie" as a comparison speaks to the uniqueness of Hopkins' standing in the sport.

Already a long-reigning world middleweight champion and the record-holder for number of title defenses with 20, Hopkins, won the world light heavyweight title by upsetting Antonio Tarver in 2006 in Atlantic City. This was followed by another upset win, this one over former junior middleweight titleholder and pound-for-pound entrant Winky Wright.

The sting of Hopkins' close title-fight loss to Joe Calzaghe in 2008, not to mention the razor-close decision losses to Jermain Taylor three years earlier, was ameliorated by his shocking and comprehensive non-title win over world middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik in October last year. He is a first-ballot Hall of Famer without question.

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Hopkins cracks Tarver en route to light heavyweight championship

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS/HBO

Max Kellerman

Saad Muhammad was a good boxer. Just like Arturo Gatti, he turned into this brawler and was a popular fighter as a result, but he probably did himself a disservice most of the time by not staying more disciplined, because he had the ability to box.

Hopkins is technically better, but outside of his pro debut, didn't fight at light heavyweight until the end of his career. So by the time he had the experience and size to cope with Saad Muhammad, he was in his 40s and we're talking about him fighting a guy in his mid-20s, with more energy who was very rugged.

I'm tempted to pick Hopkins because he'd figure out a way to do it. But my head tells me not only is Saad Muhammad younger and a natural light heavyweight, he's also athletic and fluid enough to bother Hopkins. It's hard for me to say it because Hopkins has shown time and time again that he knows how to win. I don't think the guy ever really loses. It seems to me like he'd be saying I told you so at the end and he'd prove me wrong again, but I'm taking Saad. ■

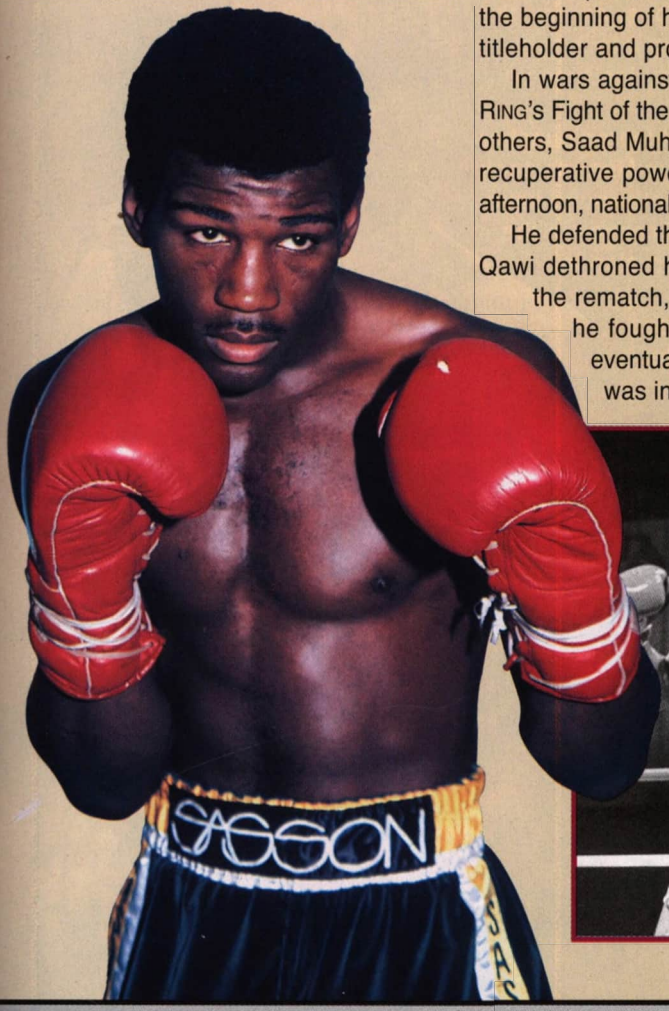
Kevin Kelley

I consider Matthew Saad Muhammad one of the greatest warriors of all-time. This man would never quit. You had to shoot this man to get him to stop. Saad Muhammad's footwork wasn't that great, and he couldn't cut the ring off too much, but he was like a juggernaut. And the one thing he had was punching power.

At 175, Hopkins doesn't really confront his opponents. He doesn't try to get into exchanges. He boxes now I don't think he would allow Saad Muhammad to do what Saad

Matthew Saad Muhammad

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Career: 1974-1992
39-16 (29)



Saad Muhammad was a safety-first boxer-puncher early in his career. In 1977 he lost a close decision to Eddie Mustafa Muhammad in Philadelphia, and decided to adopt a more aggressive approach. Thus was the beginning of his transformation into a long-reigning WBC light heavyweight titleholder and probably the most exciting fighter of his era.

In wars against Marvin Johnson, Yaqui Lopez (the second of which was THE RING's Fight of the Year in 1980), John Conteh, Vonzell Johnson, Jerry Martin, and others, Saad Muhammad parlayed thudding power, a granite chin, otherworldly recuperative powers, scar tissue, and a porous defense into regular, Saturday afternoon, nationally televised melodramas.

He defended the WBC 175-pound title eight times before Dwight Muhammad Qawi dethroned him in Atlantic City in 1982. After Qawi stopped him again in the rematch, Saad Muhammad's days as a world-class fighter ended, but he fought on anyway, mostly terribly, before retiring in '92. THE RING eventually named him the 10th greatest light heavyweight ever, and he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1998.

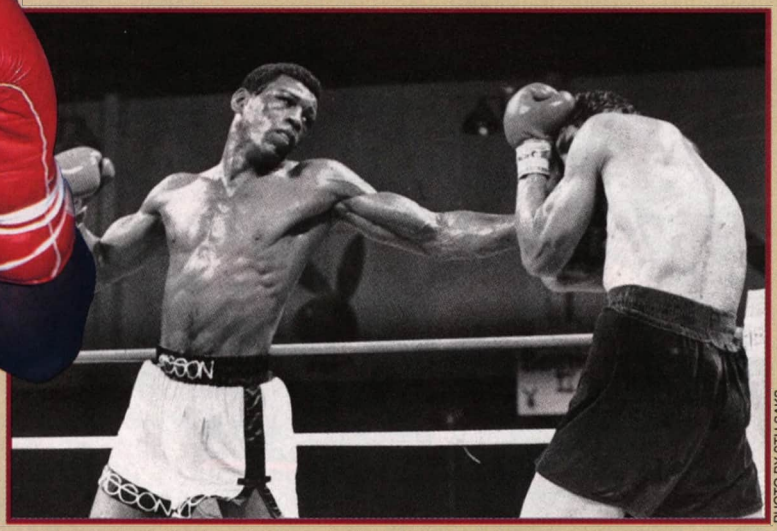


PHOTO BY STU SAKS

Saad Muhammad attacks Lopez in 1980's Fight of the Year

Muhammad does. Bernard's greatest asset is his adaptability and he's actually a boxer now, not a fighter.

I think Hopkins would run because it's the smartest thing I think he could do in this fight. Saad Muhammad would chase him, and every time he got a chance to throw at him he would throw. Saad Muhammad would want to fight and Hopkins wouldn't want to fight, which is smart, but he'd box him and I think it would end in a draw. ■

Ronnie Shields

That's a great fight right there. Matthew Saad Muhammad got hit a lot, but he had a good chin and could really take it. Look at all the guys he fought that were really hard hitters: Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, Marvin Johnson. Those guys hit harder than Bernard does. Saad's first fight with Johnson was one of the best fights I have ever seen. Those guys really fought. Those guys back then were different—they stood up and fought one another, and Saad was one of the best.

As much as I like Bernard, I don't think he could have hurt Saad. And he's smart and a great boxer, but Matthew Saad Muhammad would have given him a lot of problems with the pressure he would have put on him. I don't think that at 175 Bernard would have been able to stay with him. At a lower weight division maybe, but at 175 there is no way in the world Bernard Hopkins would have won that fight. I think Saad Muhammad would have stopped him in about 11 rounds. ■

Youngstown, Ohio
Career: 2000-present
34-1 (30)

Kelly Pavlik vs.

The world middleweight champion and former pound-for-pound entrant almost certainly feels he has something to prove following his one-sided non-title loss to Bernard Hopkins last year. After having things entirely his way over a meticulously managed professional career, the Youngstown puncher finds himself for the first time going into a fight—against Marco Antonio Rubio, which will have come off by the time you read this—with a loss on his record.

Pavlik's moment of truth came in May 2007 when he met feared puncher Edison Miranda in Memphis. An underdog, Pavlik backed up Miranda, took everything thrown his way, and scored a convincing seventh-round kayo. His next bout was no less impressive: He climbed off the canvas in the second round to concuss world champion Jermain Taylor, also in the seventh.

A rematch win over Taylor and third-round kayo of hapless English challenger Gary Lockett brought Pavlik to disaster against Hopkins, but there is little reason to believe Hopkins' feat will be duplicated anytime soon.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/TOP RANK

Pavlik enjoys an easy defense against Lockett

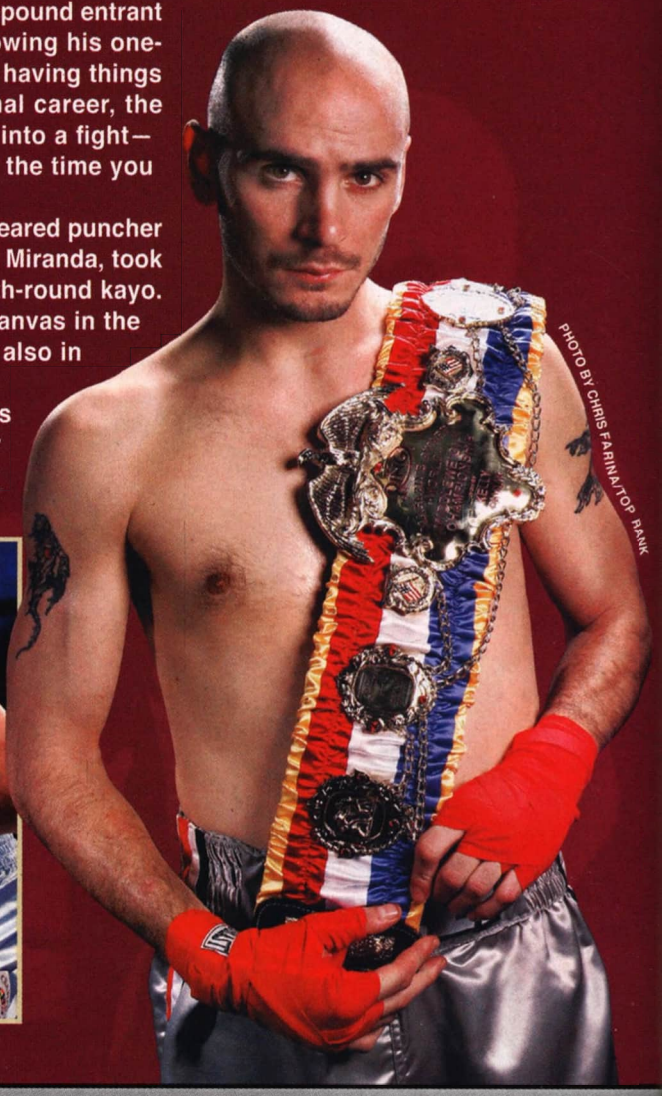


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/TOP RANK

Max Kellerman

Pavlik is all wrong for Antuofermo. They're both right there in front of each other and Pavlik throws the shorter, better, harder punches. What did Antuofermo do that would give Pavlik problems? Antuofermo was tough. That was his number-one attribute.

You might say: What about the first Hagler fight? Well, I thought he lost it, though he gave Hagler a really good fight. I'm not saying Pavlik is Marvin Hagler. But he's 6'2". He has a long reach, but he is not as well-rounded as Hagler. Still, he does certain things that are similar to Hagler. He's just a very good, basic, fundamentally sound pressure fighter. That's what Pavlik really is. He's nothing fancy.

With his very good technique and athleticism and leverage, based on his height, Pavlik is able to throw real knockout shots to the head and body with both hands. Meanwhile, he comes in behind a good jab and what can Antuofermo really do to counteract that? Is he going to get inside on Pavlik? If he does, Pavlik knows what to do inside. And Pavlik has a good chin. I think Pavlik beats Antuofermo on cuts. ■

Kevin Kelley

Kelly Pavlik is consistent. But against a real boxer, he'll get beat all day. He can't beat a boxer. If you move a little bit, he can't handle it. That's how Bernard Hopkins beat him, with just a little movement. But Kelly boxes well and he's got a good height and reach advantage most of the time. And he's a strong puncher.

Antuofermo is like another Rocky Marciano but without the punching power. He couldn't cut the ring off and he never relied on boxing ability or power. He relied on his endurance.

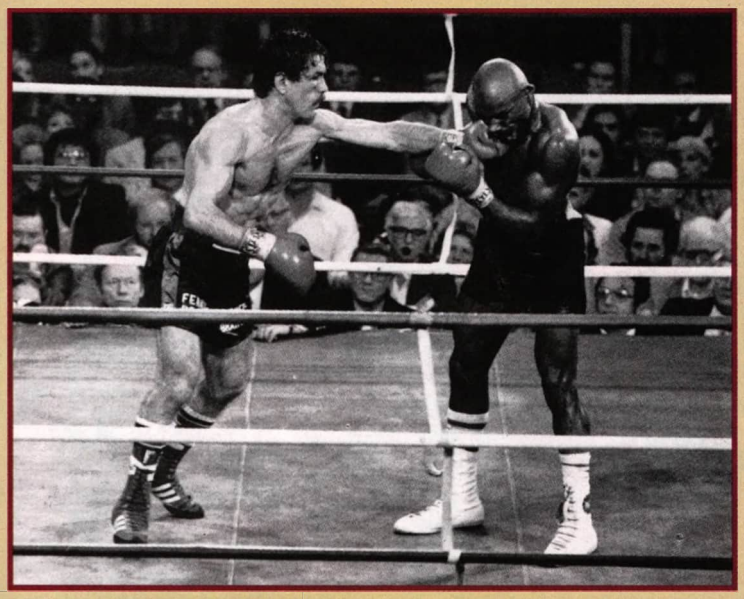
Vito Antuofermo

Brooklyn, New York
Career: 1971-1981; 1984-1985
50-7-2 (21)

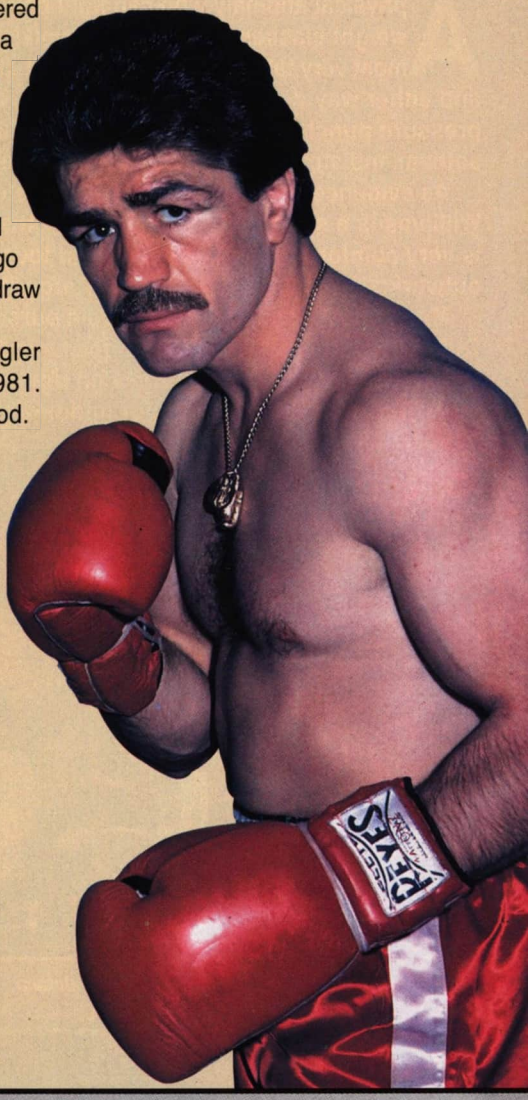
It would be unfortunate if the only thing for which Antuofermo was remembered was the experimental surgery he undertook while in his boxing prime: a procedure in which the sharp edges of his eyebrow ridges were filed down and smoothed, which he was told would prevent him from cutting so easily. For the record, it didn't help.

During a very strong middleweight era, Antuofermo bulled, clubbed, and willed himself to wins over a reasonably impressive array of 160-pound contenders including Eckhard Dagge, Eugene "Cyclone" Hart, and a faded Bennie Briscoe. He won the world middleweight title from the forgettable Hugo Corro in 1979 in Monte Carlo, and then came his shining moment: a 15-round draw against Marvin Hagler, whom most predicted would destroy him.

The Brit Alan Minter dethroned Antuofermo immediately after, and Hagler took his revenge eventually, stopping him in five rounds in Boston in 1981. Antuofermo retired then and after a brief comeback in 1984, retired for good.



Antuofermo twists Hagler's face with a left



Ronnie Shields

He was the kind of guy that, you just beat him up so much, you got tired from kicking his ass. You got so tired from kicking' his ass that he could get you and that's how he won. He was no boxer; he stood right in front of you and waited for you to hit him.

I think Pavlik would nitpick him: touch him, touch him, touch him, try to get him cut, keep him on the outside, and wear him down. Antuofermo's face couldn't hold up. Pavlik by stoppage on cuts late in the fight. ■

I remember Antuofermo, and he was basically a catcher. He was very tough and put a lot of pressure on you, but he was slow and he wasn't a very big puncher. But he was real tough and would always keep coming.

Kelly Pavlik can box and he's a good puncher. He has enough power at 160 to hurt anybody. I was so impressed with him when he fought Jermain Taylor in the first fight when he got hurt. I said, you know what, this guy's got a good chin; he got hurt, and it wasn't just one shot that did it. It was two or three shots. But his recovery time was so good that I said, I hope Taylor is in great shape because this guy is going to come and get him. And he did. When I saw that, that's when I knew Pavlik was a really good fighter.

I really like Pavlik in this fight because he can box and can hit hard enough with the right hand to make Antuofermo respect him. I think he would cut Antuofermo up and win a decision. ■

Augusta, Georgia
Career: 2000-present
36-1 (27)

Paul Williams vs.

A physical anomaly who can fight comfortably in at least three different weight classes, Williams is a walking host of contradictions: Where most very tall, lean fighters are soft-chinned boxers or knockout artists and either way do all their business from the outside, he is a high-volume pressure puncher who starts punching during the singing of the national anthem and stops sometime during the postfight press conference.

As evidenced by his win over tough veteran Verno Phillips in November, Williams is a superb bodypuncher, another incongruity for one so tall. He is very comfortable on the inside and tough and energetic enough to have outworked and outlasted Antonio Margarito in their meeting in 2007.

Many suspected Williams' bubble burst when the slick Carlos Quintana outpointed him in California in 2008, but his one-round knockout win in their rematch righted things. THE RING rates him second at junior middleweight.

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Williams' reach advantage is evident against Quintana

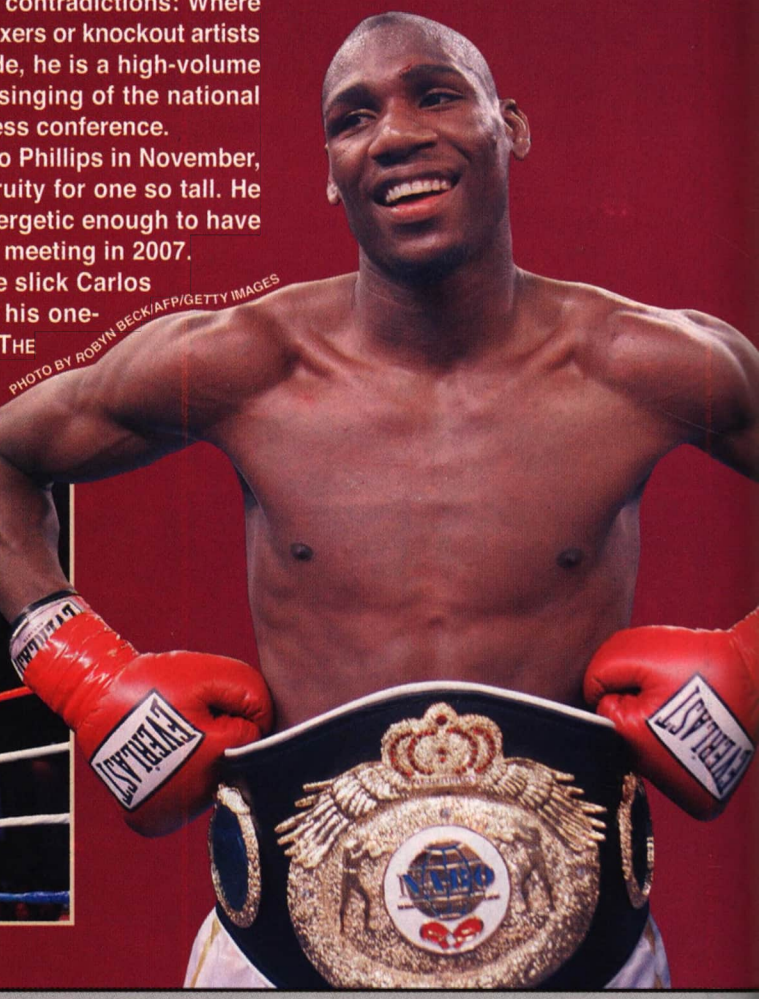


PHOTO BY ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Max Kellerman

Paul Williams can give a lot of guys trouble because of his size. He's so tall and he's such a busy puncher, and he's a southpaw. And in recent fights he's flashed better power. But I like Benitez in this one. I think Williams and fighters like him without deep amateur backgrounds get exposed against really good boxers like Benitez.

In the amateurs you really have no place to hide and have to face different styles. If you have really good international experience, you've seen it all and you've put in hours of practice at a young age.

It's like the difference between someone who grows up speaking a language and someone who learns it as second language later in life. Benitez was fluent in the language of boxing, and Williams, as excellent as he is, and fluent as he is at times, picked it up later in life. In the rock-paper-scissors of boxing, volume punchers generally beat great defensive fighters. But in this case we're talking about a supremely talented defensive boxer, an extremely experienced prodigy in Benitez. He's too schooled for Williams and all wrong for him. Benitez on points. ■

Kevin Kelley

I like Paul Williams. He's the kind of fighter who could have fought in any era. Fighters are born, boxers are made. Williams is a fighter. And he's just so busy and so big. He's way too tall for Benitez, too busy for Benitez.

Wilfred Benitez was a great counter-puncher and an incredible fighter, but if you got a guy who won't stop throwing punches, when are you going to counter him? He relied on guys throwing punches, but what if they don't stop? Benitez just played defense, making you miss one or two or three shots and then countering you. But there's no way he can get inside to

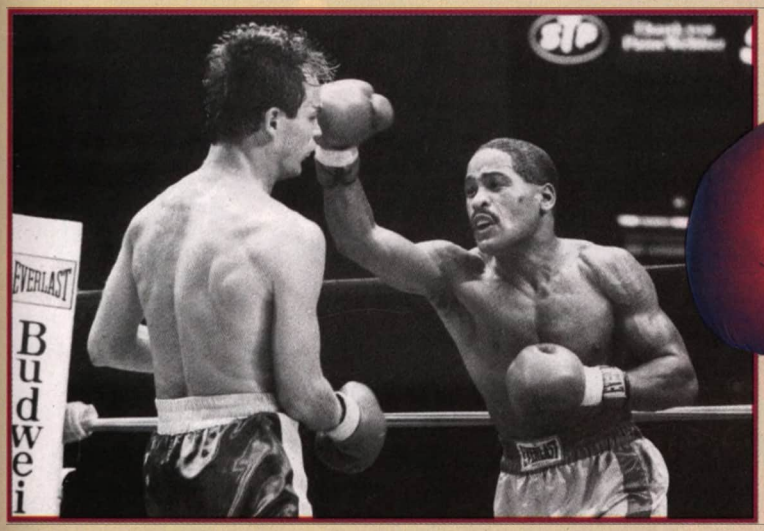
Wilfred Benitez

Bronx, New York
Career: 1973-1986; 1990
53-8 (31)

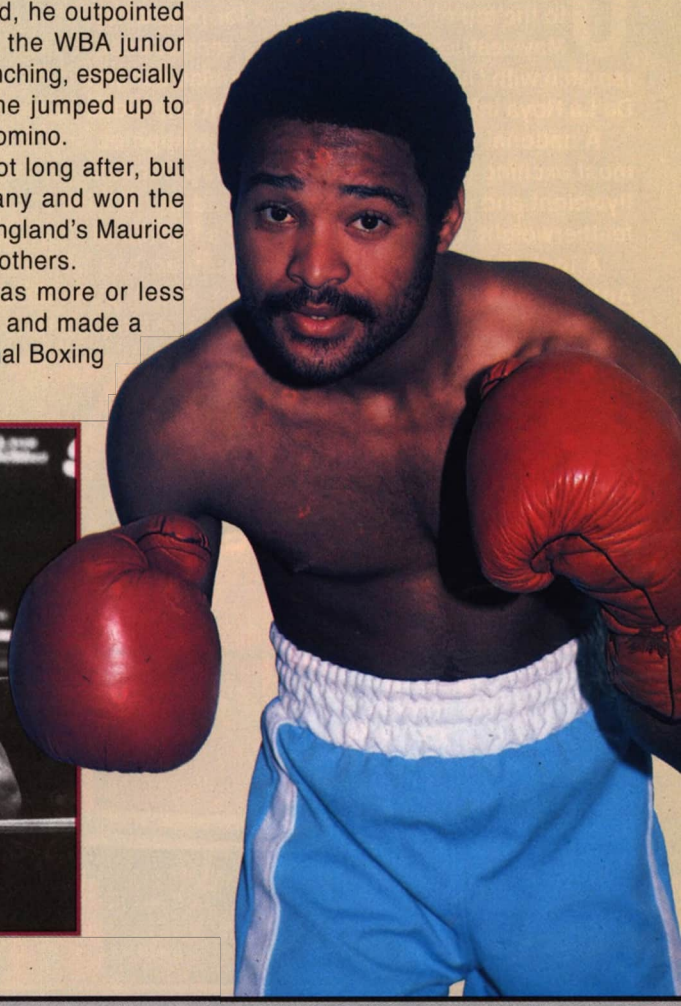
A defensive wizard and child prodigy, Benitez became the youngest fighter ever to win a world title when, at 17 years old, he outpointed the excellent Colombian Antonio Cervantes to win the WBA junior welterweight title in 1976. His mastery of the art of counterpunching, especially off the ropes, was evident again three years later when he jumped up to welterweight and dethroned the highly competent Carlos Palomino.

He is widely remembered for his loss to Ray Leonard not long after, but he later scored wins over Roberto Duran and Pete Ranzany and won the WBC junior middleweight title with a crushing knockout of England's Maurice Hope. He also lost by decision to Thomas Hearns, among others.

An inveterate partier and indifferent trainer, Benitez was more or less finished by his 26th birthday. He retired at the end of 1986 and made a brief comeback in 1990. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1996.



Benitez delivers a right during 10-round decision over Kevin Moley



Ronnie Shields

counter in this fight because Williams just doesn't stop. And Benitez never showed that he could fight on the inside as well as he could counterpunch.

Plus, Paul Williams has the reach advantage. And he's a southpaw. So how do you counter a guy who has the reach advantage on you and never stops throwing punches? How is he going to block 20 or 30 shots? And even if he does, his counter is going to come up short. Benitez had no way to get around Tommy Hearns, who was bigger and had a reach advantage. So the blueprint has already been made. Williams by knockout. ■

Benitez was a very good fighter. He was slick and fast and was a great, great counterpuncher. He might have had the best defense of any of those guys in the 1980s.

I've been watching Paul Williams a lot and he makes a lot of mistakes. He's tall but he never uses his height or reach advantage. He just never does. He definitely would have the reach advantage over Benitez, but he makes so many mistakes it wouldn't help him. He comes straight to you and punches a lot, and that's a field day for a guy like Benitez. There's just no way in the world that Williams could have touched him.

Benitez wants guys to come straight to him. That's what he did best, counter guys who threw a lot of punches. He would just make Williams miss all day long and counterpunch him like crazy. I don't think he would kayo Williams because he wasn't that hard a hitter, but he beats him by unanimous decision. ■

General Santos City, Philippines
Career: 1995-present
48-3-2 (36)

Manny Pacquiao vs.

Universally recognized as the best fighter in the sport, Pacquiao ascended to the top of boxing's pound-for-pound list partly by default when Floyd Mayweather, the previous consensus best, retired before his scheduled rematch with Oscar De La Hoya. Pacquiao competed in his stead and pounded De La Hoya into submission over eight one-sided rounds.

A national treasure in his native Philippines and also one of the sport's most exciting performers, the southpaw Pacquiao has won alphabet titles at flyweight and junior featherweight, and world titles at junior lightweight and featherweight. He was also THE RING's Fighter of the Year in 2006 and 2008.

A lock for the Hall of Fame, Pacquiao has beaten fellow stars Macro Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales (twice each), Juan Manuel Marquez, De La Hoya, and a host of other top-notch fighters from 112 to 135 pounds.

PHOTO BY JEWEL SAMAD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Pac-Man had no trouble dominating the 147-pound De La Hoya

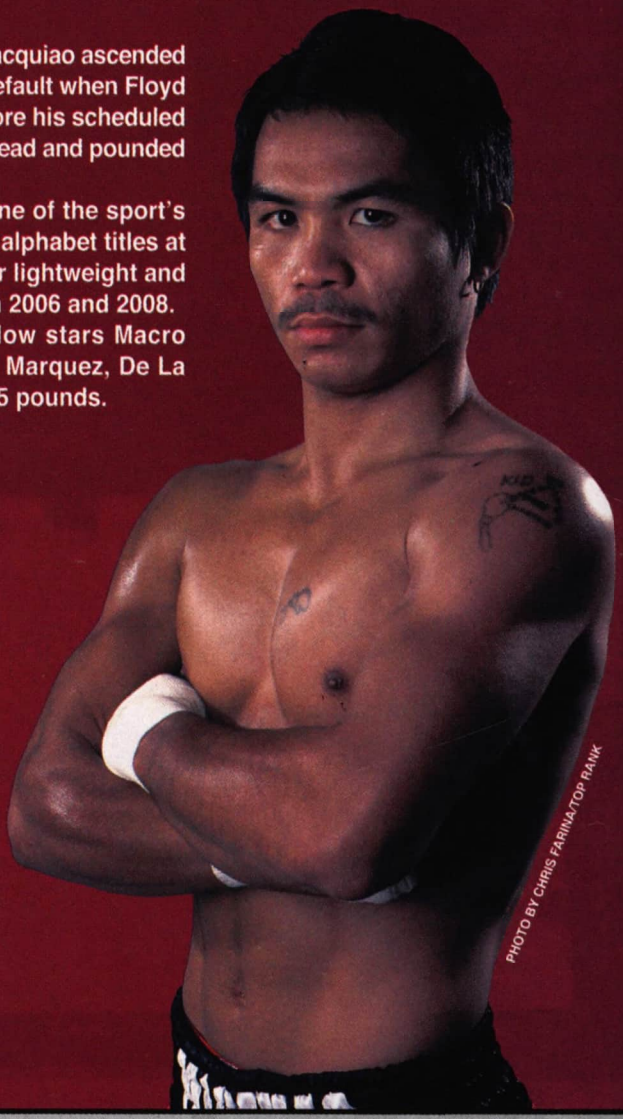


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/TOP RANK

Max Kellerman

There are a lot of things that they both do well and similarly. Aaron Pryor had this sort of frenetic energy, bouncing all over the ring and you think of him as an aggressive fighter. He was a perpetual motion guy, but that motion wasn't always coming forward. It felt sometimes like a lot of wasted motion. It turned out not to be because he always had more energy than his opponent and always won, but it felt like he wasn't being economical in his movement and his approach. Pacquiao is also kind of frenetic like Pryor was, but is much more economical and disciplined.

Over the last two or three years, and especially since the first Juan Manuel Marquez fight, Pacquiao's become much more disciplined in his style and a much better boxer. He's a little more disciplined than Pryor was, he's just as athletic, his punches are a little straighter, and he's a southpaw. Pacquiao bleeds and cuts could be a factor, but with lots of similar characteristics, I'll take the more disciplined, straighter-punching southpaw. Pacquiao on points in a brutal fight. ■

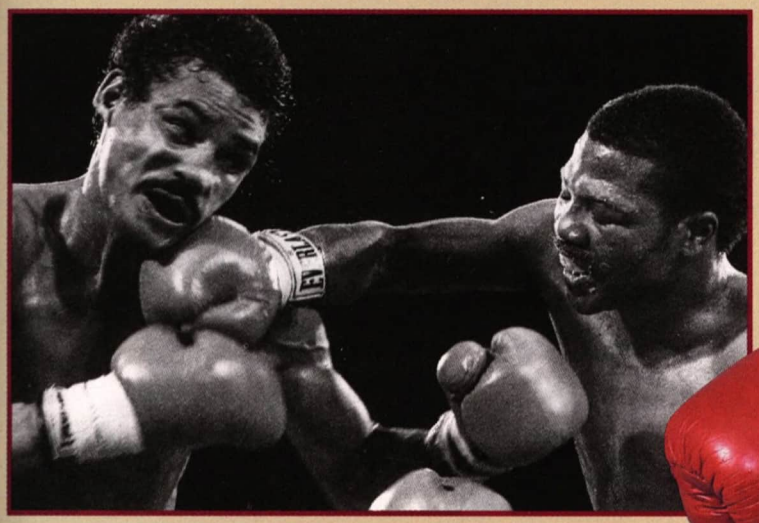
Kevin Kelley

Aaron Pryor fought the best guys around and the best puncher of the era in Alexis Arguello. He was very unpredictable and had a very awkward style.

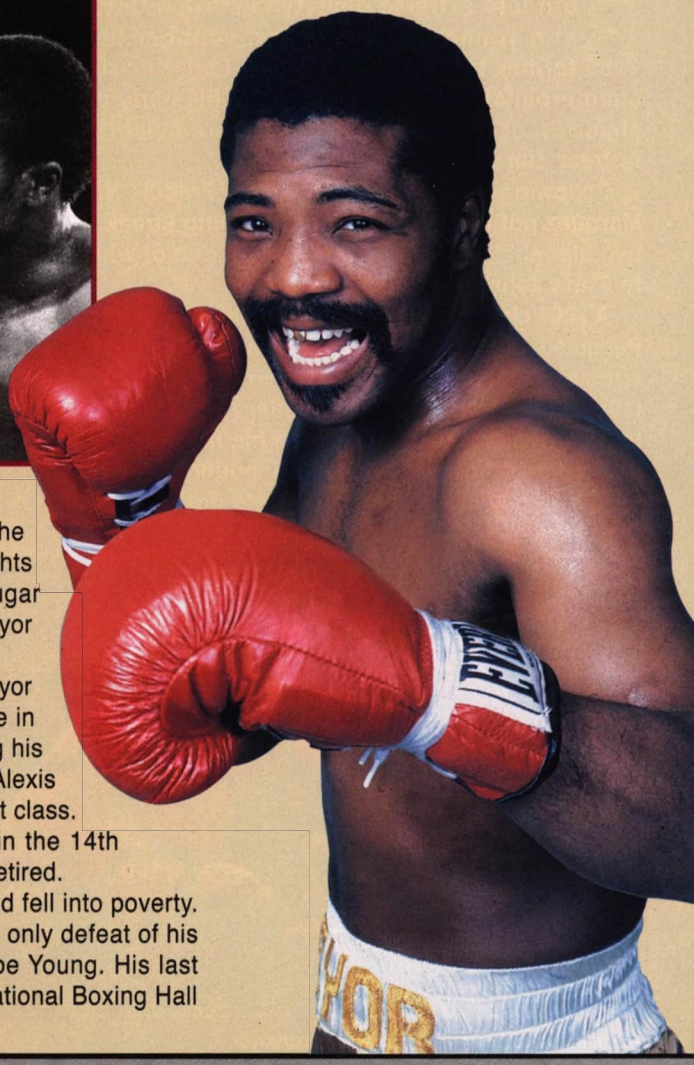
Manny Pacquiao has always fought the right guys at the right time. He relies on his left hand and his punching power. But he lacks defense. His chin is always in the air. He doesn't have head movement, he has body movement. And he doesn't really try to block punches. His philosophy is a great defense is a great offense. He throws a lot of punches but makes a lot of mistakes.

Aaron Pyror

Cleveland, Ohio
Career: 1976-1985; 1987-1988; 1990
39-1 (35)



Arguello couldn't handle Pryor's non-stop attack



Generally regarded as one of the finest fighters of the talent-rich 1980s, Pryor just missed out on huge fights against contemporary but naturally bigger stars Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler, and Thomas Hearns (whom Pryor beat in the amateurs).

A hard-slugging, modern-day Henry Armstrong in style, Pryor thrived anyway, beating Antonio Cervantes for the WBA title in August 1980. He defended the title five times before getting his own superfight against legendary three-division champion Alexis Arguello, who was attempting to win a title in a fourth weight class. In one of the great fights of the era, Pryor won by kayo in the 14th round. He repeated the win a year later and not long after retired.

In retirement, Pryor became addicted to illegal drugs and fell into poverty. He attempted several comebacks and in 1987 suffered the only defeat of his career, a ninth-round knockout loss to mediocre Bobby Joe Young. His last fight was in 1990. In 1996, he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

The difference is that Aaron Pryor looked like he was making mistakes, but they weren't mistakes; they were traps. One thing he'd always do that I do too is miss a punch on purpose so he could set you up for a counter. They both had a great work rate and lacked defense, but Pacquiao is not a 140-pounder. Pryor would stop him. It would be Pryor all day. ■

Ronnie Shields

Pryor was my roommate for the 1976 Olympic Trials and I knew him very well. He was one of those guys who was just relentless. I never saw a guy throw so many punches and have so much power behind them. I don't believe Pacquiao being a southpaw would bother Pryor at all. He fought southpaws the same way he fought right-handers. It didn't make a difference. He put pressure on you and made you stand in front of him and fight him.

I never saw anyone get around Pryor by outboxing him either. He wouldn't let them. He had the energy to throw hard punches for 15 rounds, and I don't think Pacquiao could keep up with that. He throws a lot of punches, too, but I don't think he could handle Pryor at 140 pounds. No way. This would be a good fight, but would only last maybe six rounds before Pryor stopped him. ■

Mexico City, Mexico
Career: 1993-present
49-4 (36)

Juan Manuel Marquez vs.

Born into extreme poverty in Mexico City, Marquez started boxing at a young age, as did his younger brother and two-division former titleholder Rafael. A fast, smart, technically advanced counterpuncher, he spent much of his early career in the formidable shadows of similarly sized and more celebrated countrymen Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales.

Following a close decision loss to Freddie Norwood in his first title try, Marquez put together a 13-fight winning streak, during which he captured two alphabet titles at featherweight, one of which he subsequently lost to Chris John.

A 2004 challenge of then-featherweight champion against Manny Pacquiao, during which Marquez was floored three times, ended in a draw. Subsequent wins over Barrera and Joel Casamayor, the latter for the world lightweight title, and a close loss to Pacquiao in their overdue rematch, inform his ranking by THE RING as the second best fighter in the world, pound-for-pound. As we went to press, he was training for a title defense against top-rated lightweight Juan Diaz.

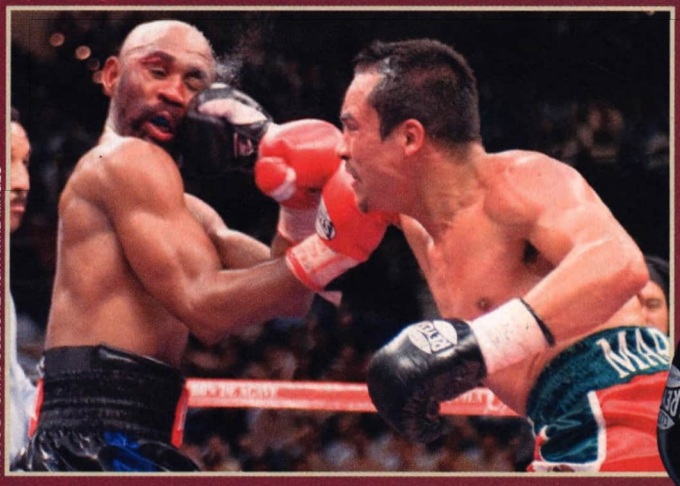
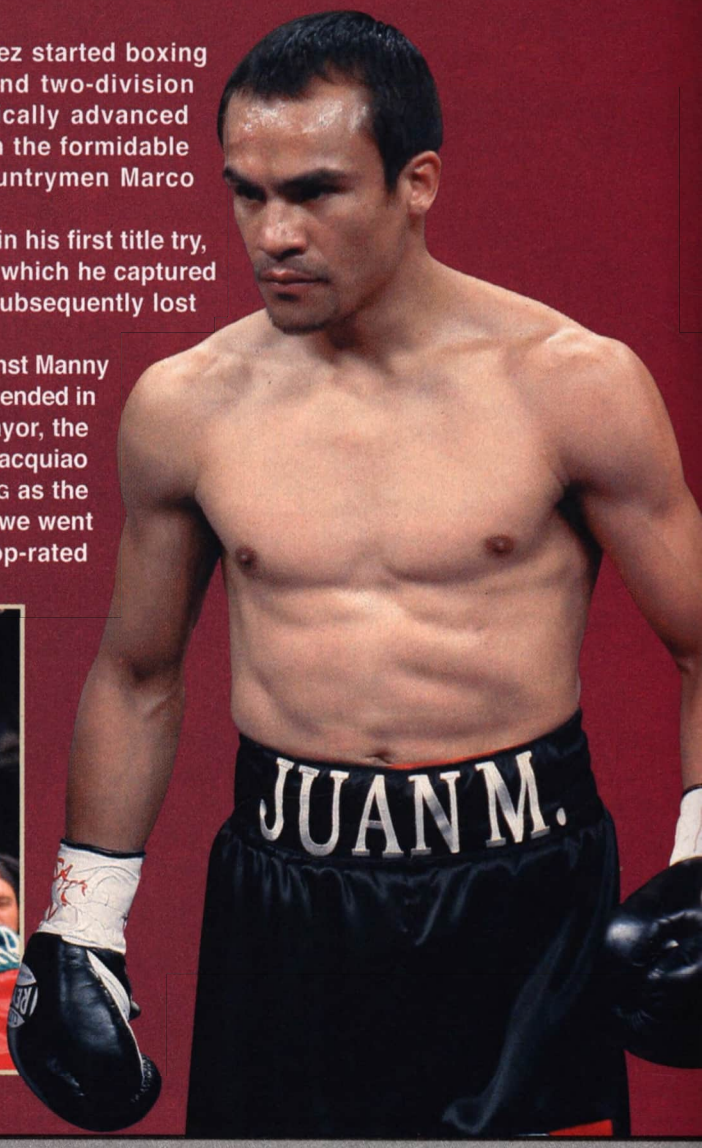


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Marquez bangs home a right against Casamayor



Max Kellerman

If you could move laterally, you could give Arguello problems. If you came at him, you were committing suicide, except until Aaron Pryor did it, and that was when Pryor was in his prime and Arguello was past his and fighting at his heaviest weight.

Juan Manuel Marquez' basic approach is safety-first. He is just a tremendous fighter. When you think about this entire era of featherweight-ish fighters, the case I would make is for Marquez being the best. He is a technically excellent and studious boxer and has heavy hands. And if you can make him fight, he will absolutely fight.

Marquez is too mobile and too well-rounded, and though there may be more fighters Arguello could beat than Marquez could beat—if they were in a tournament where everyone fights everyone, maybe Arguello's record is better—Marquez' mobility gives him the edge. I think he outboxes Arguello. Maybe Arguello catches him just the right way and knocks him out, but I think Marquez plays it safe all the way and outboxes Arguello in a dull fight. ■

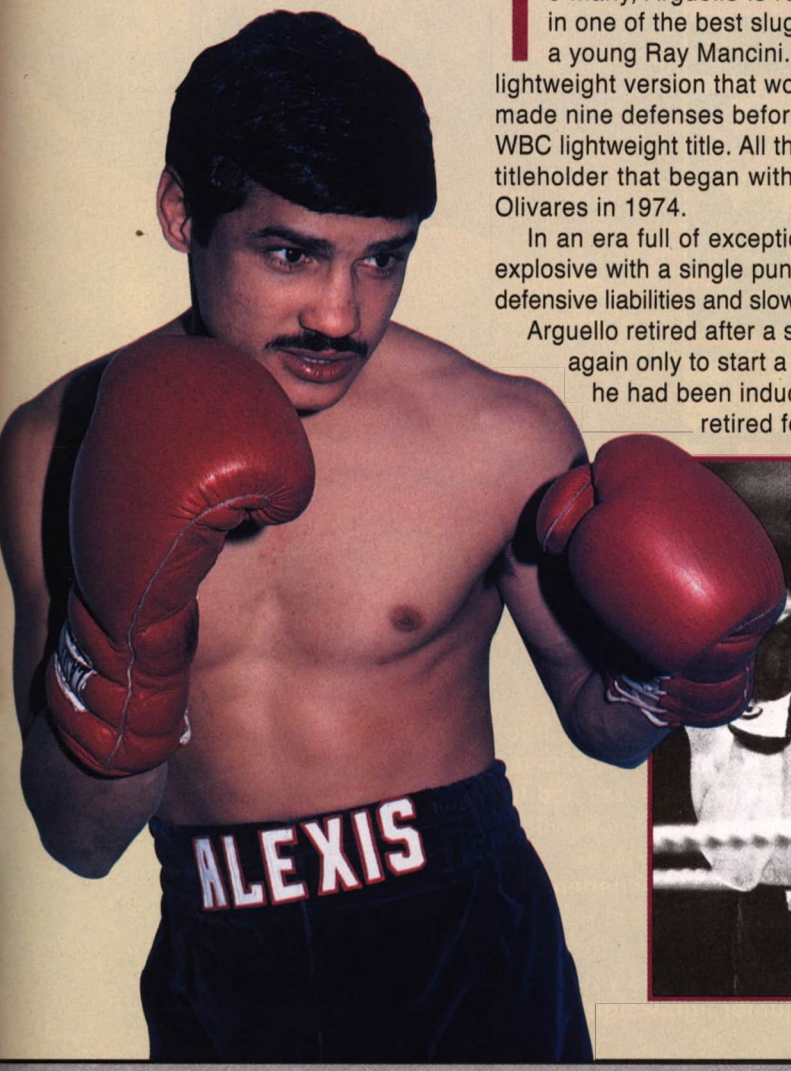
Kevin Kelley

This is a very good fight. Arguello had great punching power and a great jab to get the right hand in. He was long and lanky and people didn't expect him to have that power because when you're built that way, people don't expect you to hit that hard. A lot of guys would stand in front of him, and when he landed he knocked you out. I didn't like his footwork that much and he couldn't fight going backward. That's why Pryor took him out; he took away his punching power.

Now, Juan Manuel Marquez relies on you to go forward. When you go to

Alexis Arguello

Managua, Nicaragua
Career: 1971-1983; 1985-1986; 1994-1995
82-8 (65)



To many, Arguello is recalled primarily for his titanic loss to Aaron Pryor in one of the best slugfests of the 1980s, and maybe too for his win over a young Ray Mancini. But the very best Arguello probably was the junior lightweight version that won the WBA title from Alfredo Escalera in 1978 and made nine defenses before moving up and dominating Jim Watt to claim the WBC lightweight title. All this after a four-year reign as the WBA featherweight titleholder that began with a knockout of the great Mexican puncher Ruben Olivares in 1974.

In an era full of exceptional punchers, Arguello might have been the most explosive with a single punch. His one-punch power made up for considerable defensive liabilities and slowness of foot, both of which were exploited by Pryor.

Arguello retired after a second loss to Pryor, fought briefly, and then retired again only to start a comeback in 1994 at the age of 42, two years after he had been inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. He retired for good in 1995.

Arguello spears Watt with a left

Marquez, which is what Arguello does, Marquez hits you with counters. He might be one of the best counterpunchers ever. He would counterpunch Arguello all night. It isn't in this fight what Arguello did so well, it's what he *didn't* do so well—and that's fight going backward. He could only fight going forward—and into the strength of Marquez. Arguello crossed his feet and had no bounce in his legs, so he couldn't box. He just threw straight, hard punches at you. But Marquez can box moving forward and backward. Marquez by decision. ■

Ronnie Shields

Arguello had a long reach, and was tall, 5'10". He had one of the most powerful right hands in the smaller weight divisions. And he had a really good chin. The only guy that ever really gave him trouble was Aaron Pryor, and that wasn't until later in his career.

You have to give it to Juan Manuel Marquez. He's a really, really good fighter, and a great counterpuncher. But Arguello, with that long reach, I think would have kept him at bay and wouldn't have let Marquez get close to him. I don't think Marquez' movement would have bothered Arguello, because if you look at the Pryor fight, he didn't move a lot, he just came at Arguello and threw a lot of punches, and ran into a lot also.

When Arguello got you at the end of that jab and then the right, it didn't matter what angle you were on, if he hit you with the right, he hurt you. He would have been too strong at 135 for Marquez, and especially when he was younger he was more mobile. And he had that power that would have been too much for Marquez. I would say Arguello by kayo in about 10 rounds. ■

Bolero Alto, Venezuela
Career: 2002-present
24-0 (24)

Edwin Valero vs.

PHOTO BY KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Valero puts Michael Lozada on the floor

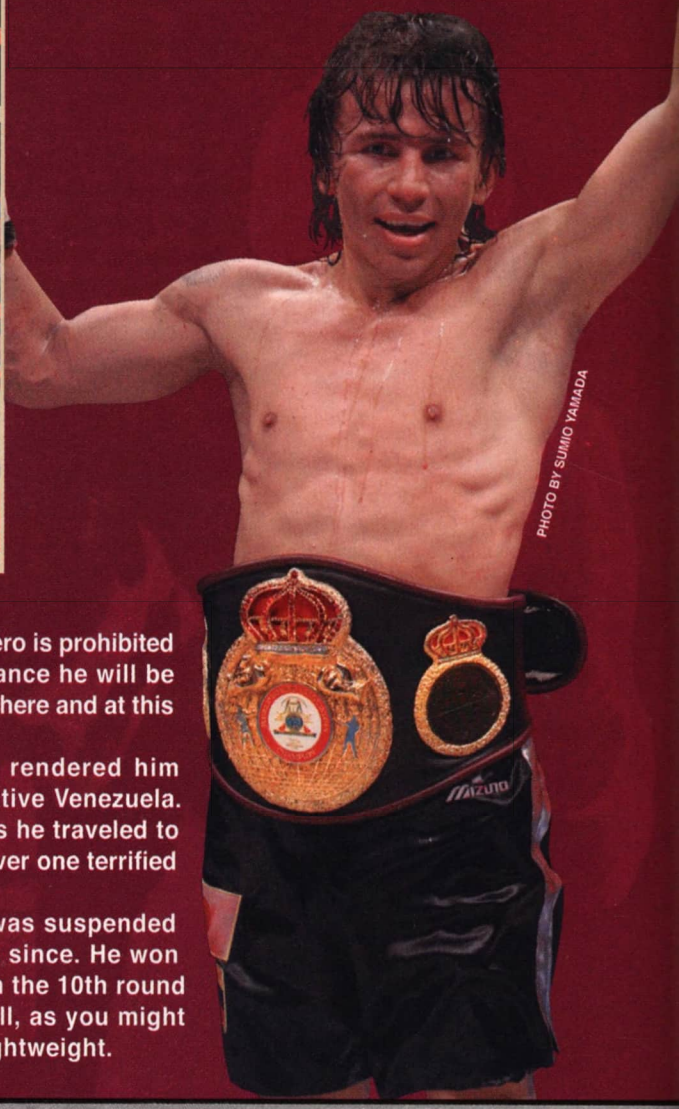


PHOTO BY SUMIO YAMADA

It is one of the great ironies of the modern game that Valero is prohibited from fighting in the United States because of the chance he will be knocked out and seriously injured, while he fights elsewhere and at this writing has knocked out every man he's faced.

Valero's natural aggression and punching power rendered him something of a sensation right out of the box in his native Venezuela. Each of his first 18 fights ended in the opening round as he traveled to the United States, Panama, Japan, and France, bowling over one terrified junior lightweight after another.

After a brain scan revealed an abnormality, Valero was suspended indefinitely in the U.S. and has fought mostly in Japan since. He won an alphabet title by stopping tough Vicente Mosquera in the 10th round in Panama City and has defended the belt four times, all, as you might guess, by knockout. He is THE RING's top-rated junior lightweight.

Max Kellerman

Right now we're essentially asking Valero to do something he's never done—prove himself at this level against a guy we've seen in these kind of situations. Valero at this moment looks like a very promising, athletically gifted fighter. He can punch, he looks like he can fight, and he has a lot of people very excited about him. The truth is we haven't seen him in this type of situation and don't know how he would handle a guy like Escalera. We just haven't seen it yet.

Escalera was physically a really talented guy. He made as many title defenses as Pipino Cuevas. He gave a prime Alexis Arguello a very hard time twice, he fought frequently against a lot of different kinds of styles, and he fought all over the world. He was a very experienced, capable, talented guy.

I'll take Escalera in a real good fight. He was talented and just too experienced for Valero at this point. ■

Kevin Kelley

Valero's knocked out everyone he's faced, but he hasn't knocked out anyone important. He's got a big punch, but he's a UBO, an unidentified boxing object. He can punch, but I'm waiting for him to fight someone he can't knock out and somebody that really can fight back so we find out more about him. But for now he's just a puncher.

Escalera was crafty, experienced guy who fought a lot of good fighters. He fought hard and was always tough. He was a hard guy to

Alfredo Escalera

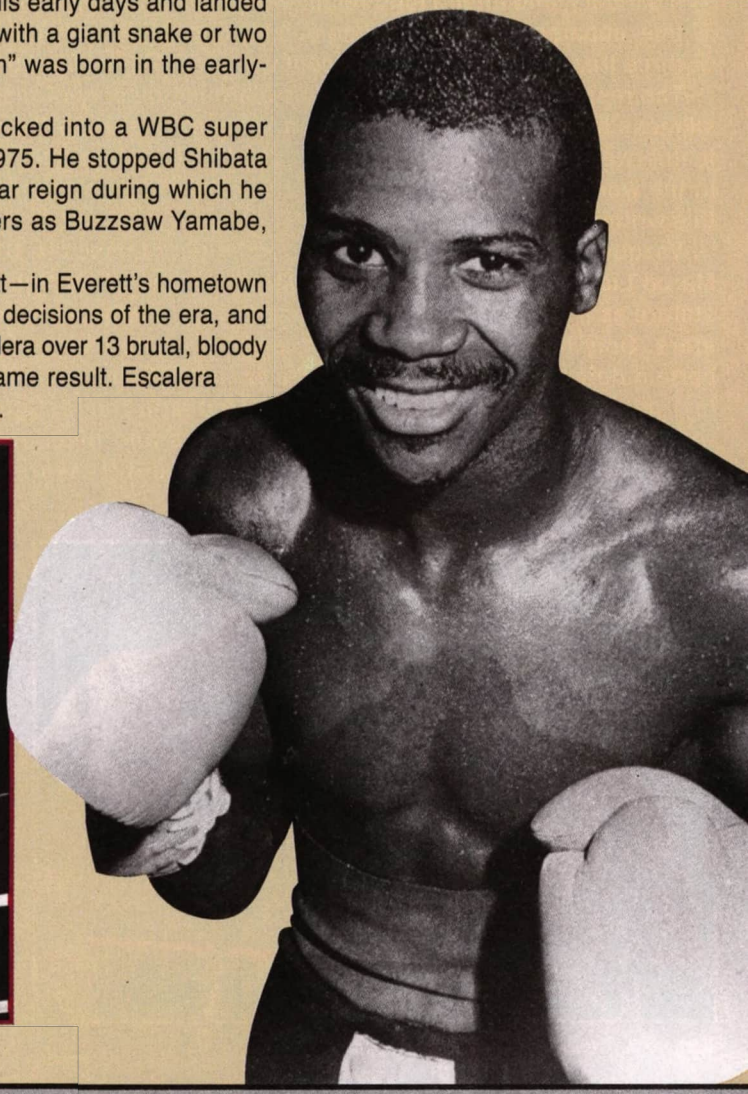
Carolina, Puerto Rico
Career: 1970-1979; 1981-1983
53-14 (31)

Like most fighters, Escalera needed a gimmick in his early days and landed upon an odd one: He frequently entered the ring with a giant snake or two draped over his shoulders. And thus "Snake Man" was born in the early-1970s junior lightweight division.

Following an indifferent early career, Escalera lucked into a WBC super featherweight title fight with Kuniaki Shibata in July 1975. He stopped Shibata in the second round and embarked on a busy two-year reign during which he tallied 10 title defenses against such varied challengers as Buzzsaw Yamabe, Ray Lunny II, and Ronnie McGarvey.

His November 1976 decision win over Tyrone Everett—in Everett's hometown of Philadelphia no less—is recalled as one of the worst decisions of the era, and not terribly long after Alexis Arguello had dethroned Escalera over 13 brutal, bloody rounds in San Juan. A rematch yielded precisely the same result. Escalera never contended again and retired permanently in 1983.

Escalera sends Jose Fernandez reeling with a hook



Ronnie Shields

beat—smart and sneaky and very experienced. He was around for a long time and fought everybody.

I think Escalera beats him. I don't think he would knock him out, because when you're fighting a puncher like Valero, you don't want to commit. So he would just box him. Valero would put pressure on him and try to knock him out, but Escalera would have been too slick for him and won by decision. ■

Valero is a puncher. He hasn't fought a lot of well-known fighters yet, but I tell people all the time: When two guys step in the ring, both guys have a chance. As long as somebody's in front of you, you've got a chance. And somebody's been in front of Valero every time.

And Valero is not fighting just anybody. He's not fighting guys they just dug up. He's fought some good guys. And he can punch. You can see it. I give him a chance against anyone because he's a puncher.

Escalera was a good fighter, a talented guy. But I think, as good as he was, Valero would have been too strong for him. The pressure Valero would put on him would be too much. Escalera was a good fighter, but I think Valero is just too powerful. I feel he would stop Escalera around the ninth or 10th round. ■

Mexico City, Mexico
Career: 1995-present
43-4 (31)

Israel Vazquez vs.

In January, and after a long reign, Vazquez was stripped of his alphabet title, apparently for not healing quickly enough following the last of his three treacherous and magnificent wars with Rafael Marquez.

The responsible governing body's alarming display of mendacity and silliness has no bearing whatever on Vazquez' status as the world junior featherweight champion, or on his high standing among the best fighters in the world, pound-for-pound (THE RING places him at number five as of this writing).

Vazquez' record is no manufactured edifice: Losses to Ulises Flores, Marco Licona, Oscar Larios, and Marquez in their first fight inform his stature as a two-fisted gambler among today's many over-protected stars. Only his desire and power snatched a late victory from certain defeat against Jhonny Gonzalez in 2006, and a similar last-minute rally saved him against Marquez in the last go-round. He is among the very best punchers and bleeders in the game today, making him an exciting and treasured performer indeed.

PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Vazquez delivers a right to Marquez' head

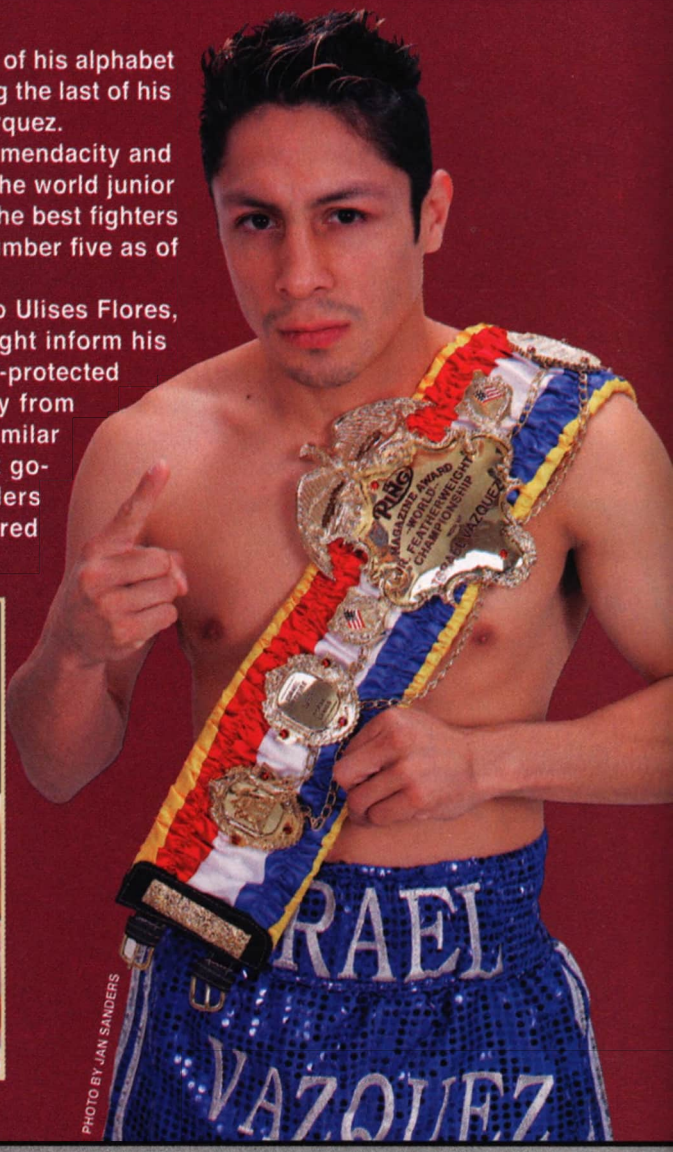


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Max Kellerman

I like Israel Vazquez a lot. Against Rafael Marquez, in their first fight, his nose was mangled and he stopped fighting. He quit. I'm not saying he shouldn't have quit; I would have quit long before he did. The vast majority of people who ever lived would have quit.

I'm not saying it was a bad decision or that he shouldn't have quit. But what we demand of fighters in order to say that they're truly great is that they don't quit in those circumstances. And he did. Now, Vazquez came back and won two incredible fights against Marquez, and if you want to call him a great fighter, I'm not going to argue with you, really. But he quit.

Gomez came up short in the biggest fight of his career, but that fight was against Salvador Sanchez, one of the best featherweights who ever lived. Meanwhile, he beat Carlos Zarate and made 17 title defenses, all by knockout. The only thing he was missing was great speed. If he was fast, he would have had everything. I think, as good as Vazquez is, it would take a little more to beat Gomez. I think Gomez stops him. ■

Kevin Kelley

Vazquez is so tough. He's got good offense. He's got somewhat questionable defense, because he gets hit with everything, and same thing with Gomez—questionable defense, but he just kept throwing, throwing, throwing. So they both did the same thing. It would be a matter of who could take more.

Gomez was very durable. He could box decent enough, but you could draw him into a tough fight. If you hit him with a good shot, he'd come out of his shell and start fighting you. Which means

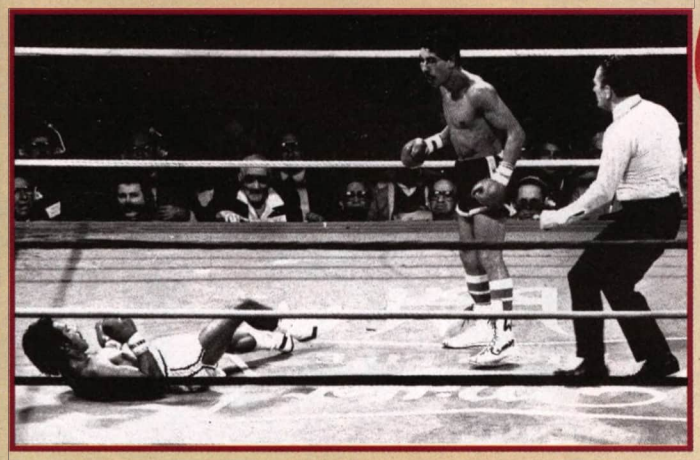
Wilfredo Gomez

San Juan, Puerto Rico
Career: 1974-1986; 1988-1989
44-3-1 (42)

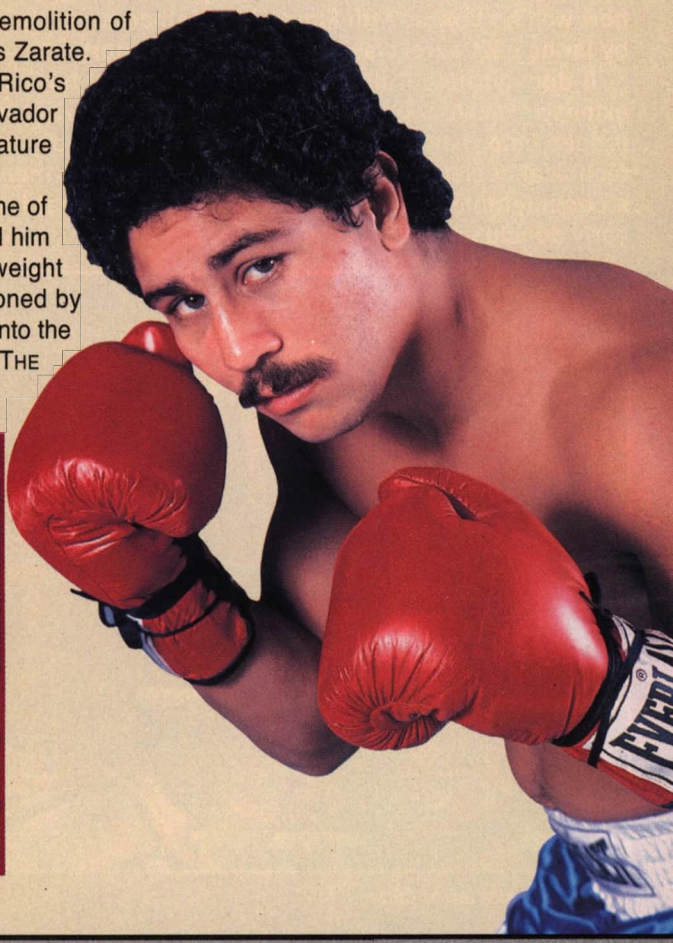
An icon in Puerto Rico before anyone had heard the name Felix Trinidad, Gomez won the WBC super bantamweight title in 1977 in his 17th pro fight, with each previous contest having ended by knockout. His 17 title defenses remains a record for the division, and his kayo percentage in title fights is unparalleled among the smaller fighters.

Gomez' greatest win was his October 1978 fifth-round demolition of the great undefeated Mexican bantamweight titleholder Carlos Zarate. It remains one of the most celebrated prizefights in Puerto Rico's history. Conversely, his loss by knockout to featherweight Salvador Sanchez in their 1981 superfight was a terrible blow to his stature and legacy.

Gomez' brutal 14-round win over Lupe Pintor in 1982 was one of the more memorable wars of the era and more or less finished him as a top-notch fighter. He managed to win the WBC featherweight crown against Juan LaPorte, but was knocked out and dethroned by Azumah Nelson. He retired for good in 1989 and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1995. Eight years later, THE RING named him the 13th greatest puncher of all-time.



Gomez puts Pintor on his back



Ronnie Shields

he was dangerous because he had a multi-dimensional style. He could fight you or box you, but if he didn't have the discipline to box Vazquez, he would fight with him.

This is a real good one. They're both the same kind of fighter. Vazquez can take it and give it. Gomez could take it and give it. What a great fight. They would beat the living crap out of each other. It would go the distance with both men bleeding, swollen, cut everywhere, and be a draw. They would have to do a trilogy. ■

I fought on one of Gomez' cards in Puerto Rico when we were both with Don King. This guy was good. He was really good. Gomez hit harder and really sat down on his punches, better than Vazquez does. He's the one who would make the fight. He's the stronger guy. He'd put pressure on Vazquez.

Vazquez is a great combination puncher. He likes to use his jab and then open up with powerpunches. His jab is really good and he's the better boxer of the two. Gomez would pressure him, but Vazquez wouldn't just go to the ropes and get hit. He'd let both hands go and hit Gomez with combinations and score punches from the outside.

Both of these guys are really good fighters. Vazquez is so good, but Gomez was a little bit stronger. I think this would have really been a close fight. I really have to call it a draw, or you could have either guy by split decision. They'd have to fight three or four times, like Vazquez and Rafael Marquez, to find out who was better. ■

Guaynabo, Puerto Rico
Career: 2001-present
32-0 (6)

Ivan Calderon vs.

Calderon, the world junior flyweight champion and the ninth best fighter in the world pound-for-pound according to THE RING, is proof that one needn't possess a big punch to be a world-class fighter. With just six kayos in 32 fights, he has the lowest kayo percentage of anyone in THE RING's pound-for-pound ranking, which is a testament to how well he boxes. With Floyd Mayweather currently inactive, Calderon is by far he best pure, classical boxer in the sport.

It doesn't help Calderon's opponents that he is a southpaw with an extensive amateur background that saw him lose, notably, to Brian Viloria. It does help them that he can be a bit of a bleeder, as evidenced by his technical decision win over rival Hugo Cazares, when a headbutt opened a considerable gash on Calderon's forehead that forced the fight to an early conclusion.

PHOTO BY SUMIO YAMADA

Calderon wings a left at Cazares

Max Kellerman

Every once in a while a guy comes along and you think, *If I could fight like anyone, I would want to fight just like him.* I thought that was Lopez at his best. I know, he ducked tough competition by staying where he was, and I don't think he would have beaten Mark "Too Sharp" Johnson. But I don't think Calderon is Too Sharp.

I know there is a speed gap; Lopez was not the fastest guy. But his technique was really good, he had really good punching power, and I just think he was super special.

We haven't seen Calderon stopped, and I like Calderon. But the only special fighters that jumped out at me at that super tiny little weight class—because I'm too young to remember Miguel Canto—were Ricardo Lopez and Mark Johnson. Those are the two that that I've seen where I go, "Okay, I'm watching someone that's not like everybody else." Calderon is a fine boxer and he's fast, but I wouldn't put him in that category. I say Lopez stops him. ■

Kevin Kelley

Ricardo Lopez is the most underrated Mexican fighter in the history of Mexican fighters. He's the best Mexican fighter I have ever seen. I think he was even greater than Julio Cesar Chavez. Chavez relied on being able to take your shots and you not being able to take his. Lopez didn't have to do that. He had a great defense and a great offense, he could move, he could fight going forward, going backward, everything.

Calderon is a one-dimensional kind of fighter; he relies on you coming

Ricardo Lopez

Cuernavaca, Mexico
Career: 1985-2001
51-0-1 (38)

You could consider being called the greatest strawweight ever a backhanded compliment—sort of like being told you have the nicest teeth of anyone in the trailer park.

Strawweights make very little money, and the division has no long history on which to draw for comparison sake; its first beltholder, Kyung Yun Lee, was crowned in June 1987. There are so few high-quality strawweights that even the very good ones don't get much exposure.

Nevertheless, Lopez is viewed not only as the greatest strawweight ever, but as one of the best fighters of his era and a giant among the little men of the sport. He went 16 years and 51 fights without a loss and wasn't even appreciably taxed in the ring until the tough, heavy-handed Rosendo Alvarez took him to the brink in their draw in 1998. He fought four more times, one a rematch win over Alvarez, retired in 2001, and waited for the Hall of Fame to call. They did, and he was inducted in 2007.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Lopez mixes it up with Alvarez

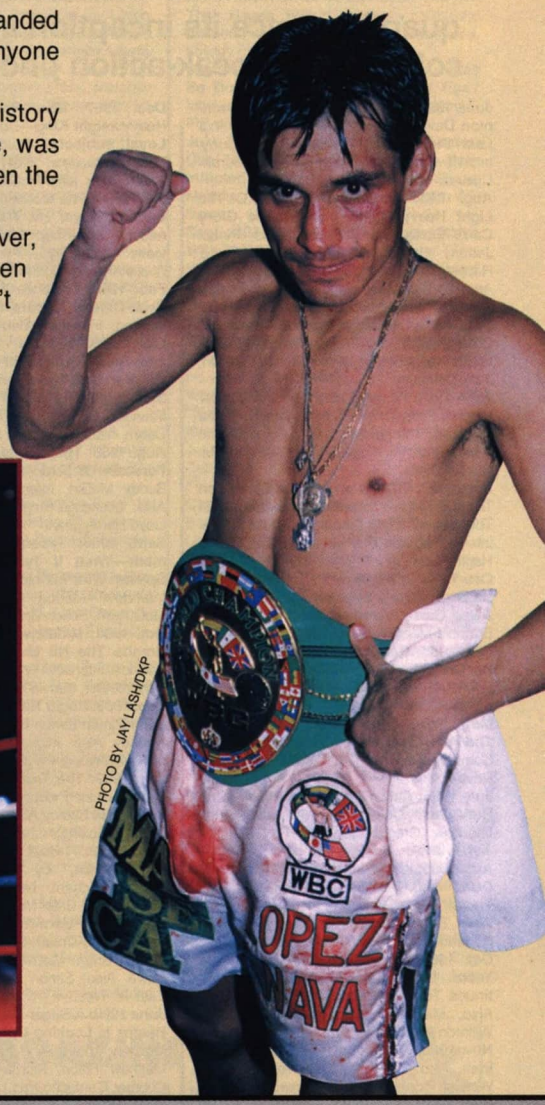


PHOTO BY JAY LASHKP

Ronnie Shields

forward and then he moves and boxes and counters. And I don't think he boxes that well; I think he boxes okay. He is fast and he can move a lot and is in shape, but I don't think that's enough against Ricardo Lopez.

It's Lopez all day. He's just too much for Calderon—too big, too strong, too much of a surgeon. Calderon is in over his head here, way out of his league. I don't know if Lopez could knock him out, because Calderon can take a beating. He might be able to stop him, but I'll say he'd probably win by decision. ■

Calderon is a good, little fighter. He can box, move, he's fast, he's always in condition. But nobody beats Ricardo Lopez. I don't care who it is. This guy, he just was unbelievable, just a good, good fighter. He could box, he could punch, and when it was time for him to get out of the way of punches, he could do that too. I just don't see anybody beating him.

Lopez deserves all the credit he gets. A lot of these smaller guys take fights just to make a lot of money. He stayed in his division because he didn't gain a lot of weight and never had trouble making weight. He fought because he loved the sport and wanted to be the best at his weight. He didn't care about moving up in weight and making money and all this other stuff. I think he got to 30-0 or whatever and just said, "I'm going to stay here and go undefeated for the rest of my career."

He knew who to mess with and who not to mess with, but if those guys like Too Sharp Johnson and Michael Carbajal had made his weight, he would have fought them. He knocks Calderon out. ■

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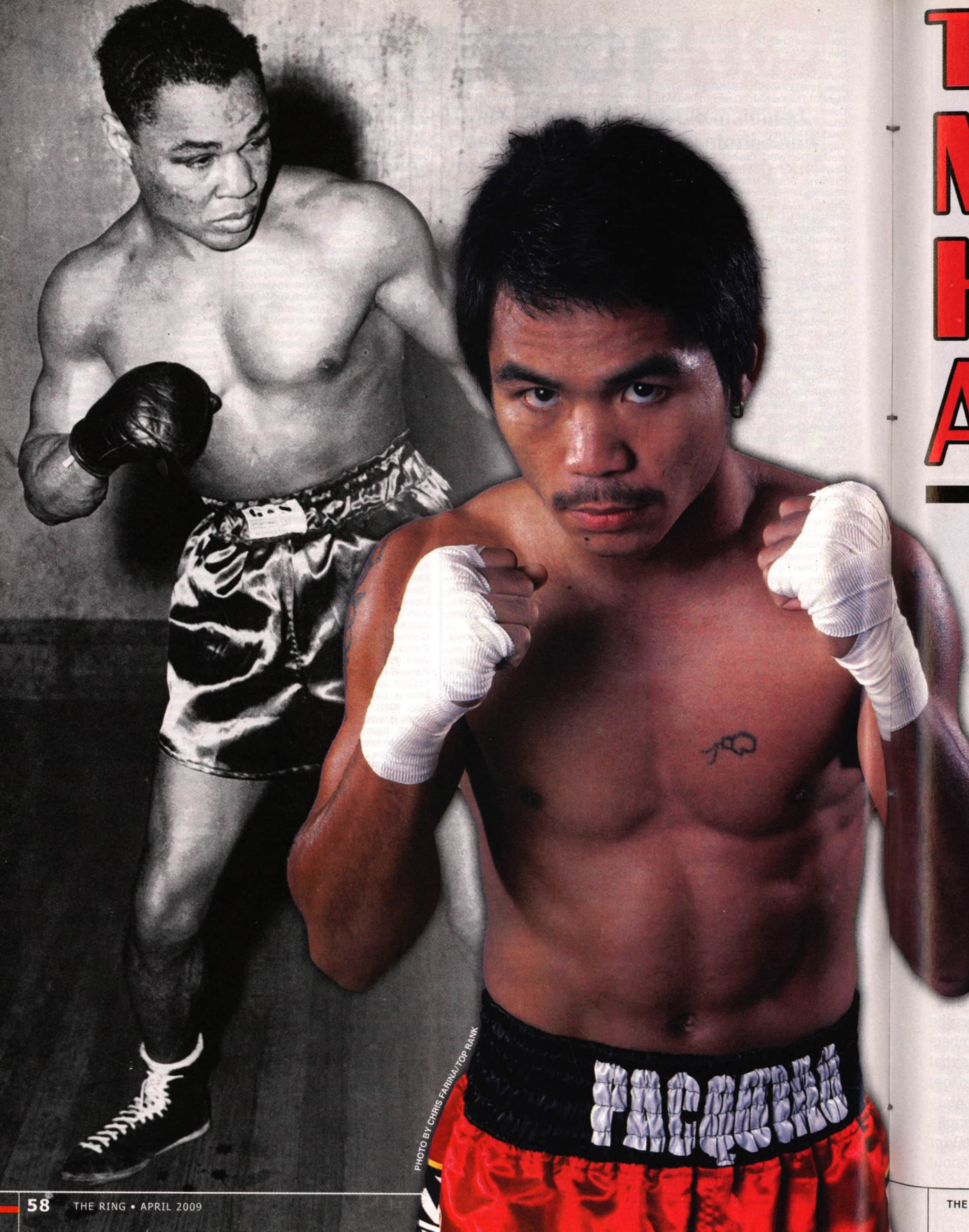

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THE MODERN-DAY HENRY ARMSTRONG

Does Manny Pacquiao Live Up To That Standard?

By Don Stradley

"So they said, 'We want you to win three championships.' This was a strategy. We had worked this out simply because we were trying to make more money. So they said, 'If you can win three championships, you'll have the flamboyance of a heavyweight.' I said, 'It sounds pretty good to me.'"

—Henry Armstrong

When Henry Armstrong lost the welterweight championship to Fritzie Zivic at Madison Square Garden in October 1940, boxing observers regarded the title change as a shocking upset. It's not that Zivic wasn't handy, it was that Armstrong's reputation had grown to monolithic proportion. Joseph C. Nichols of *The New York Times* reported, "Zivic did what the rank and file of boxing followers deemed impossible."

Just before the bell ended the 15th and final round, Armstrong fell, partly from a punch, partly from exhaustion. That Armstrong collapsed at this moment was significant. True, Zivic had exhausted him, but it seemed that Armstrong's Herculean energy had finally run out. For not only had he once swept the featherweight, lightweight, and welterweight championships in a 10-month period, but he'd embarked on a schedule that was as punishing as the sport itself, defending the welterweight crown 18 times during a two-year period. The kid who had once worked for the Missouri-Pacific Railroad had become a kind of human locomotive, roaring and belching fire

as he ran over the opposition, settings standards that will never be matched.

In 2008, as Manny Pacquiao defeated Juan Manual Marquez for THE RING junior lightweight championship, David Diaz for the WBC lightweight title, and Oscar De La Hoya at welterweight (with no titles at stake), it became fashionable to mention Armstrong's name along with Pacquiao's. It's never bad to recall a great fighter from the past, but after Pacquiao chiseled away the remains of De La Hoya's image last December, the comparisons to Armstrong grew more frenzied, as if finally, Armstrong had an equal. But some aren't sure the comparisons are necessary.

"Comparing him to Armstrong may be a disservice to Pacquiao," fight historian Bert Sugar told THE RING. "Pacquiao is *sui generis;* he needn't be compared to anyone. He may be the best Asian fighter of all-time, and perhaps the best southpaw of all-time. But you can't compare him to Armstrong, because no one compares to Armstrong."

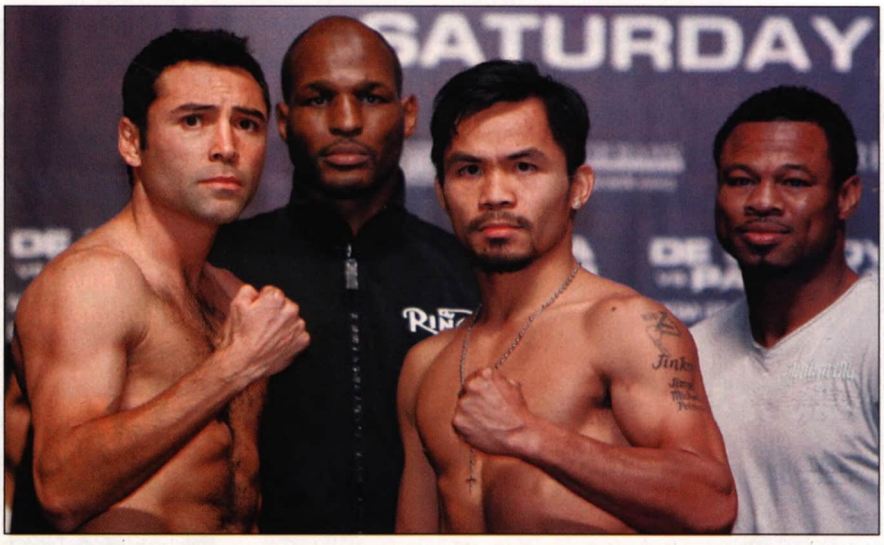
The numbers put up by Armstrong are staggering. Some quick examples: Armstrong defeated 15 world champions—at a time when there was only one champion per weight class, and only eight classes; he defeated over 10 men who would be enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame; and he once made four title defenses in *one month,* October 1939 (some sources say five, but one of the bouts was advertised as a non-title fight). Granted, if Armstrong fought now, he wouldn't rack up four defenses in one month, or one year. The negotiations alone would cause most promoters to have strokes. But Armstrong's era was different. At a time when fighters fought frequently, Armstrong was the busiest of champions.

Where Pacquiao also differs from Armstrong is that he doesn't have the aura of invincibility that glowed around Armstrong, an aura that started emanating on New Year's Day, 1937, when Armstrong knocked out Rodolfo Casanova in Mexico City. Armstrong would win 27 bouts that year, 26 by knockout. One of those wins was a sixth-round stoppage of Petey Sarron for the featherweight crown.

1937 was also the year Al Jolson, one of the most popular entertainers of the day, bought a piece of Armstrong's contract, giving Armstrong's profile a major boost. Jolson partnered with actor George Raft and boxing manager Eddie Meade to pilot Armstrong's career. To give Armstrong cachet worthy of his new Hollywood connections, it was suggested he try for three titles simultaneously.

With the featherweight title locked up, the next step was to meet lightweight champion Lou Ambers at Madison Square Garden. However, Garden promoter Mike Jacobs despised Ambers' manager, Al Weil. Out of spite, Jacobs proposed Armstrong skip Ambers and face welterweight champion Barney Ross. On May 31, 1938, Armstrong defeated Ross by decision for championship number two, dominating Ross from bell to bell. In his very next fight Armstrong completed the triple play, winning a split decision over Ambers. Armstrong immediately relinquished the featherweight title and carried on as a "double-champion."

Then, in a bout that saw Armstrong penalized five times for low blows, he lost the lightweight title back to Ambers on points. This was amid rumors that Jacobs was under pressure to get the belt off of Armstrong, for the very thing that had made Armstrong a star was creating controversy. Prior to 1937, there'd been no rule about



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Armstrong and Ross square off prior to their 1938 match in which "Homicide Hank" won the welterweight title (above), and De La Hoya and Pacquiao at the weigh-in for their 2008 welterweight bout (below) that Pac-Man won via TKO.

PHOTO BY JOHN GURZINSKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Pacquiao connects with a right to Juan Manuel Marquez' face during their thrilling 2004 bout that ended in a draw. Marquez has given the Filipino his toughest fights, and Pac-Man will need a definitive victory over the Mexican to solidify his legacy.

champions fighting for belts in other weight divisions. But once Armstrong became a triple champion, there were serious complaints that Armstrong and his managers were monopolizing the titles. The New York commission, which set the tone for the rest of the country, created a rule in December of 1939 forbidding two champions to fight, unless the lighter champion voluntarily surrendered his belt.

Armstrong's sweep of Sarron, Ross, and Ambers trumps Pacquiao's sweep of Marquez, Diaz, and De La Hoya, partly because Diaz doesn't measure up, and also because Armstrong fought an additional 14 times during that 10-month period. But a general look at how Pacquiao and Armstrong compare in various categories shows that Pacquiao holds his own.

The Early Years

After a few professional bouts, Armstrong went back to the amateurs to try for the 1932 Olympics, and when that failed, he resumed fighting for money. By his third year as a pro, Armstrong had scratched out a record of 19-4-6 (6).

Pacquiao was actually more accomplished during his salad days, winning the WBC flyweight title in his 25th bout. He suffered two knockout losses, but one of them came after a failed attempt to make weight. Pacquiao's early victims of note include Lehlohonolo Ledwaba (for the IBF super bantamweight title), Emmanuel Lucero, and Jorge Julio.

The Featherweight Years

Had he never fought as a welterweight, Armstrong would still be remembered as one of the top featherweights of his day. His key achievements at what would now be featherweight and junior lightweight include wins over Sarron, Mike Belloise, Benny Bass, Baby Arizmendi (two out of four), Juan Zurita, Midget Wolgast, and Chalky Wright.

At roughly the same weight, Pacquiao's conquests include Marco Antonio Barrera (twice), Fahsan 3K Battery, Hector Velazquez, Erik Morales (two out of three), Oscar Larios, and Jorge Solis. There were also two bouts with Marquez, a draw (at feather) and split-decision win (at junior light).

As for who accomplished more in this category, it's apples and oranges. Pacquiao faced heavier punchers, Armstrong faced more Hall of Famers, although some were past their primes.

Which Was The Greater Accomplishment, Beating Ross Or De La Hoya?

Armstrong jumped from featherweight to welterweight to face Ross. Pacquiao jumped from lightweight to welterweight to face De La Hoya. Both feats made history, but these career-making bouts were surprisingly easy for both Armstrong and Pacquiao.

If you consider that Pacquiao started his career as a 106-pounder, while Armstrong weighed 120 for his debut, Pacquiao's win over Oscar was more impressive than Armstrong's win over Ross. Pacquiao was also giving away several inches in height and reach to De La Hoya, while Armstrong and Ross were approximately the same size, although Ross outweighed Armstrong. Pacquiao also gets credit for stopping Oscar, whereas Ross went the distance; depending on who tells the tale, Armstrong either carried Ross for the final rounds, or Ross bravely remained upright.

But Pacquiao's win had some smoke and mirrors behind it. For instance, much was made of De La Hoya having fought

twice at middleweight, but he'd been terrible at middleweight. Also, Pacquiao's trainer, Freddie Roach, had worked with Oscar and knew his best days were well behind him; matching Pacquiao with Oscar was less risky than it seemed on the surface.

Ross, on the other hand, was a long-reigning champion, a 7-5 favorite, and had shown no signs of deterioration. Unlike Oscar, who'd weakened himself to make 147, Ross was at his natural fighting weight. Ross also fought harder than De La Hoya, although, as the *Times* noted, his punches "bounced off Armstrong like hail on a slate roof."

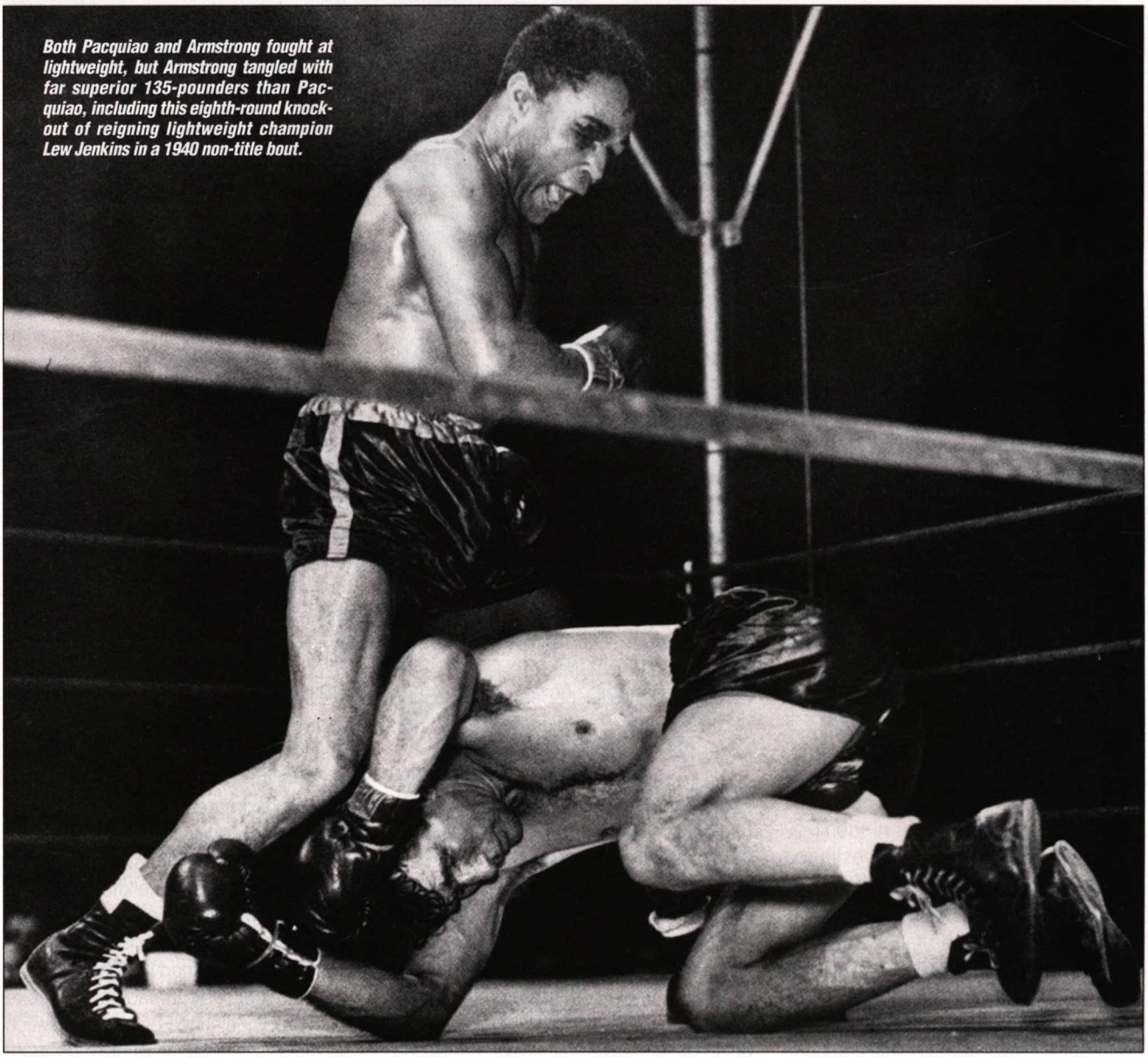
The edge in this category goes to Armstrong, but not by much.

Lightweight And Beyond

This is where Armstrong blows Pacquiao out of the water. Rarely weighing more than 135, Armstrong was ostensibly a lightweight beating up welterweights, occasionally giving up as much as 13 pounds. During this period he defeated Pedro Montanez, Lew Jenkins, Arizmendi again, Ralph Zannelli (twice), and several more unfortunates. Some have said the 147-pound division was not especially strong during this period, but Fritzie Zivic didn't defend 18 times, that's for sure.

This was also when Armstrong, at 142 pounds, challenged Ceferino Garcia for a portion of the middleweight crown (recognized only in California). Armstrong was allegedly offered a bribe to fall in four, but he refused and handed Garcia a typical Armstrong-style mauling. The contest was declared a draw by referee George Blake. More than 60 years later, the peculiar stench from that bout still lingers.

If Pacquiao is to be mentioned alongside Armstrong, the hard work begins now. Pacquiao has one win at lightweight and one at welterweight. Roach has said that Pacquiao will not continue at 147, which is wise. Still, should Pacquiao beat Ricky Hatton, score a definitive win over Marquez, and perhaps lure Floyd Mayweather out of retirement and beat him, he'd have a strong case for being the modern-day Armstrong. We may be



Both Pacquiao and Armstrong fought at lightweight, but Armstrong tangled with far superior 135-pounders than Pacquiao, including this eighth-round knockout of reigning lightweight champion Lew Jenkins in a 1940 non-title bout.

Pac-Man vs. Homicide Hank

Manny Pacquiao-Oscar De La Hoya was billed as "The Dream Match," but the real dream match would pit Pacquiao against Henry Armstrong.

Style wise, Armstrong moved forward constantly, crouching low, his spindly legs wide apart, his fists pumping like pistons, or flailing wildly. He was also good with headbutts. Low blows too. Nothing violent was alien to "Homicide Hank." In fact, he was occasionally jeered or showered with cups and cigar butts because of his dirty style.

Ever since Pacquiao struggled to a six-round technical draw with the late Agapito Sanchez in 2002, it has seemed to us that a rough fighter like Armstrong could make life difficult for Pacquiao. Who can forget how frustrated Pacquiao was in that bout, overwhelmed by Sanchez' foul tactics, practically weeping between rounds. The Pacquiao of 2002 would be served up as a tasty snack for Armstrong, who would've clawed the youngster into bloody submission, probably winning by late-round TKO.

The mature Pacquiao, however, has become a more poised fighter, using his legs to keep a working distance between himself and an opponent. Pacquiao is now a sharpshooter, jumping in, doing his damage, and jumping out. The Pacquiao of recent vintage might earn a decision over Armstrong.

—D.S.

asking a lot, but it's not easy to match a fighter whose record resembles an international zip code.

Armstrong's Endgame

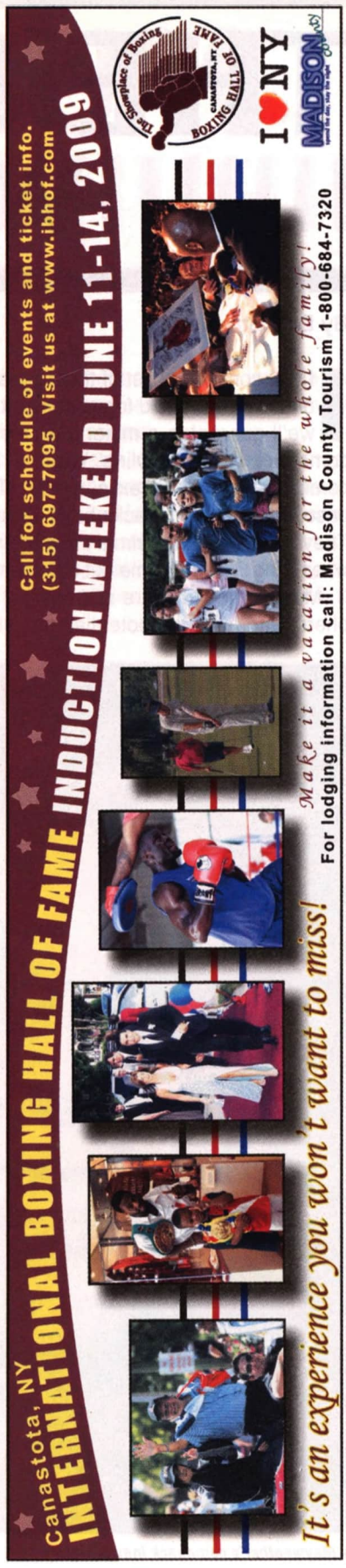
Armstrong seemed done when Zivic beat him a second time, but he scored wins over Bummy Davis, Jenkins again, and some less distinguished characters at whistle stops along the way. He even caught up to Zivic, beating him over 10 rounds when Zivic was no longer champion. But the relentless schedule, the ferocity of his fights, and a growing alcohol indulgence eventually caught up with Armstrong.

In 1943, a faded Armstrong lost to a fellow who had made his professional debut on the undercard of the first Armstrong-Zivic bout, a young cat named Sugar Ray Robinson. The idea of Robinson battling Armstrong is fascinating, but the *Times* described it being "as tame as a gymnasium workout between father and son." Armstrong told author Peter Heller, "It was a disgusting fight. I said, 'Ray, this is the Garden, and they're booing. I've never been booed in the Garden, so they must be booing you.'"

Armstrong, 151-21-9 (101), quit boxing in 1945. He overcame alcoholism, married a few times, became an ordained minister, tried managing fighters, struggled financially, and spent his final years working with underprivileged children in St. Louis. He died in 1988 at age 75. Just as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton occasionally swap places in the hearts of film connoisseurs, so it is with Robinson and Armstrong among boxing experts. In 1994, THE RING chose Armstrong as the greatest welterweight of all-time. More recently, another RING survey chose Robinson. Bert Sugar's 2006 book *Boxing's Greatest Fighters* slots Robinson as the all-time best in any division, with Armstrong at number two. What all will agree on is that Robinson was lucky he didn't meet a prime Armstrong. At his very best, Henry Armstrong stood alone.

Meanwhile, Pacquiao shines brightly in this era, and that's more than enough. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to THE RING.



THE COMEBACK
Why Some Succeed

By Don Stradley

If you compiled a list of the biggest fights of all-time, the ones that will stand forever as part of the game's lexicon, we'll guarantee a majority of them have some kind of comeback in the storyline. Whether it was Muhammad Ali coming back from his exile, or Mike Tyson returning from a prison stretch, comebacks have always been big business. They stir something primal in us, going all the way back to when King Beowulf came out of retirement to face a dragon.

Most comebacks are staged with a carnival-like atmosphere, and have the potential to put our star performers in embarrassing predicaments, two things the public has never been able to resist. Comebacks are the ultimate tightrope walk. The press does its part, mulling over the same old questions as to why rich athletes would return to such a grueling pastime as boxing, and reminding us that most comebacks end up rather messy. With Floyd Mayweather and Oscar De La Hoya allegedly pondering returns, we'll brace ourselves for another round of comeback-mania.

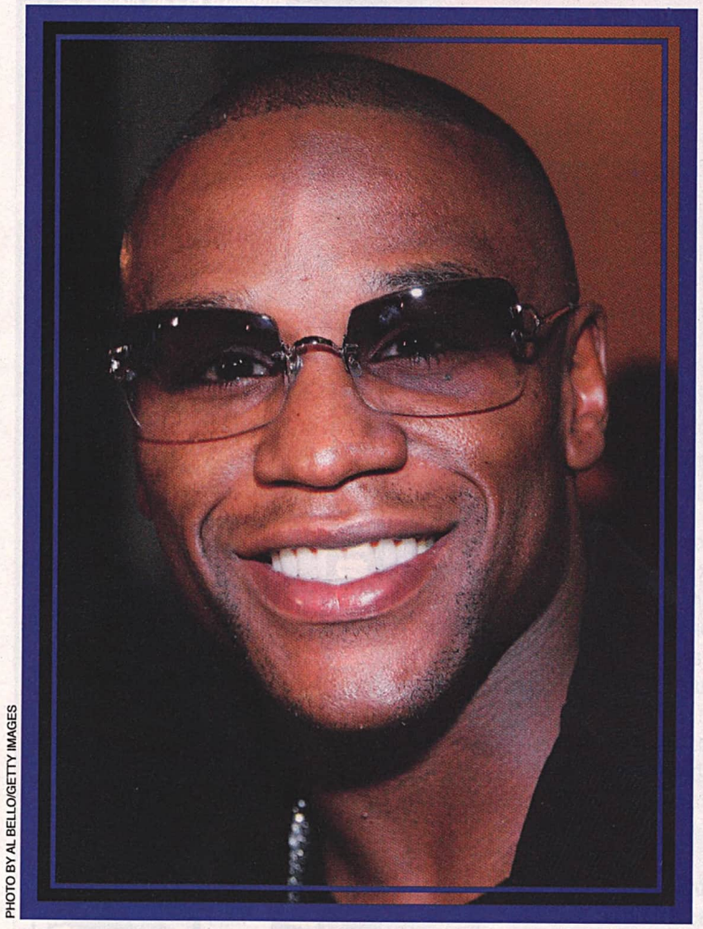


PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Is Mayweather's comeback inevitable?

Some could argue that Mayweather's possible return isn't even a comeback. It's certainly not in the same category as, say, Vinny Paz coming back after being immobilized in an automobile accident, or George Foreman returning after a 10-year absence. Mayweather would be coming back after what amounts to a long vacation. At worst, he'll be a little bit flat. As for De La Hoya's proposed return, that's a different story.

De La Hoya's non-performance against Manny Pacquiao last December was right up there (or down there) with Ali's loss to Larry Holmes in 1980, complete with a late-round surrender on his stool. Such thorough beatings are not often followed by grand successes, and certainly not when the fighter in question is a 36-year-old millionaire who has been sleeping in silks since the Clinton administration.

What's unique about the alleged comebacks of "Pretty Boy" and "The Golden Boy" is that neither is hurting financially, and neither is particularly old, although De La Hoya's balloon has less air in it than it once did. Assuming they did come back, the reasons would be obvious: De La Hoya probably wants to go out on a better note than a one-sided ass-kicking; Mayweather probably misses the athletic thrill that only boxing gives him. Without boxing, Mayweather has no identity. As for De La Hoya, planning the future of Golden Boy Promotions can't be as much fun as landing a clean left hook on somebody's jaw, and watching them drop to the canvas like a length of chain.

Boxing attracts a certain type of thrill-seeker. Catching a football or dunking a basketball just isn't the same as smashing a man into a heap in front of a large, paying audience. Super Bowl rings are nice, but most of the players don't even get to touch the ball. The World Series is great, but unless you pitched a no-hitter or knocked in a game-winning run, no one remembers you being on the team. In boxing, it's just you. Sugar Ray Leonard once said boxing made him into a full-blown adrenaline junkie. The search for excitement was why he developed a drug habit during his first retirement; nothing outside the ring compared to the heady rush of winning a fight.

"I wanted more; I wanted that arena," Leonard said. "I didn't want anyone to tell me my career had to end."

Joe Louis' entire career seemed to be one comeback after another. He came back from being kayoed by Max Schmeling; he came back from a three-year Army hitch; he came back from retirement to fight Ezzard Charles; he came back one last time to keep the wolves of the IRS from his door. In a way, Louis taught every generation that followed that a fighter can come back from a devastating loss, but too much time off can ruin the best of them. His final comeback ended horribly, and left a lot of people with a lump in their throats. Sportswriter Jimmy Cannon addressed the aging Louis by writing an open letter that ended, "You can still make a lot of money by letting guys punch you around. What else does a guy fight for? But it always seemed it was for more than money. That's why you affected people so. You can't help it if a whole lot of people feel lousy every time you fight. But they do. They do."

Not all comebacks are catastrophes. Some are quite magnificent. For some reason, the disasters are easier to remember than the triumphs. Rather than recall Leonard's amazing comeback victory over Marvelous Marvin Hagler, our minds fill with the image of Louis being fished back into the ring after being knocked through the ropes by Rocky Marciano. Perhaps we subconsciously hope for disaster. And don't discount the catharsis of seeing that our idols are mortal, after all. That's a lesson learned only through experience. Even Beowulf learned this. He killed the dragon, but was mortally wounded in battle and buried on a cliff overlooking the sea.

In a way, comebacks serve as a bizarre rite of passage. If a fighter loses, he can then pass into civilian life, comfortable in knowing that he can no longer compete. Finding out that you're done is just as important as finding out you can hurt people with your gloved fist. When Gerry Cooney, graying at the temples and attempting a comeback, grinned into the TV cameras after being kayoed by Foreman, he said simply, "That's it. I'm done." He looked serene.

As the following section illustrates, comebacks are as much a part of boxing as bum decisions and converted southpaws. Whether Mayweather and De La Hoya returns would court success or wild failure, they may want to consider new music for their ring entrances. We'll suggest the old Emerson, Lake, and Palmer tune that begins, "Welcome back my friends, to the show that never ends …"

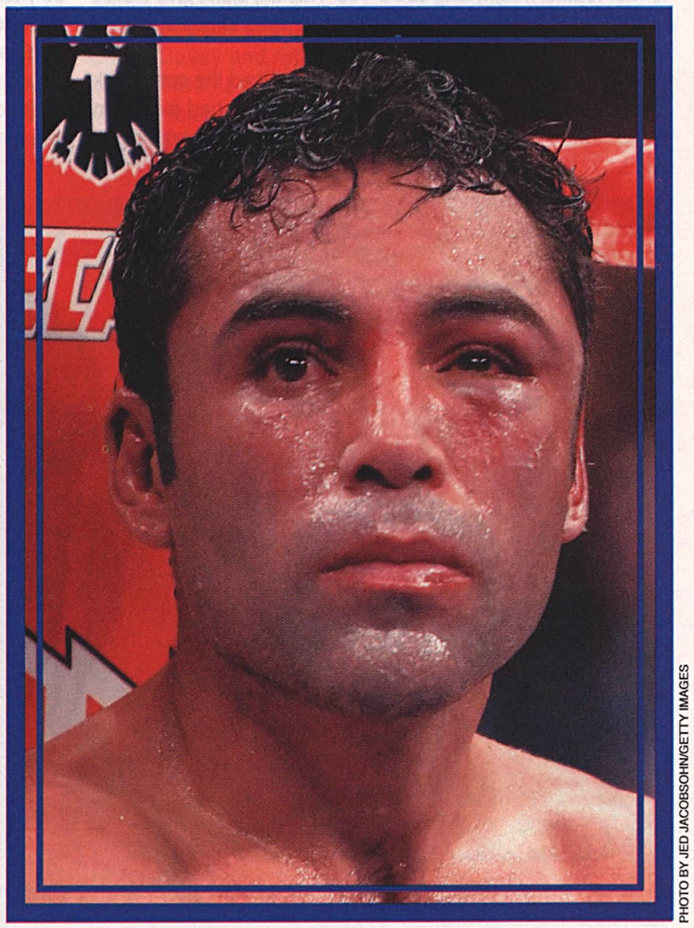


PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Does De La Hoya want to try again?

CONUNDRUM
And Others Fail

FIVE THAT SUCCEEDED

WILLIE PEP

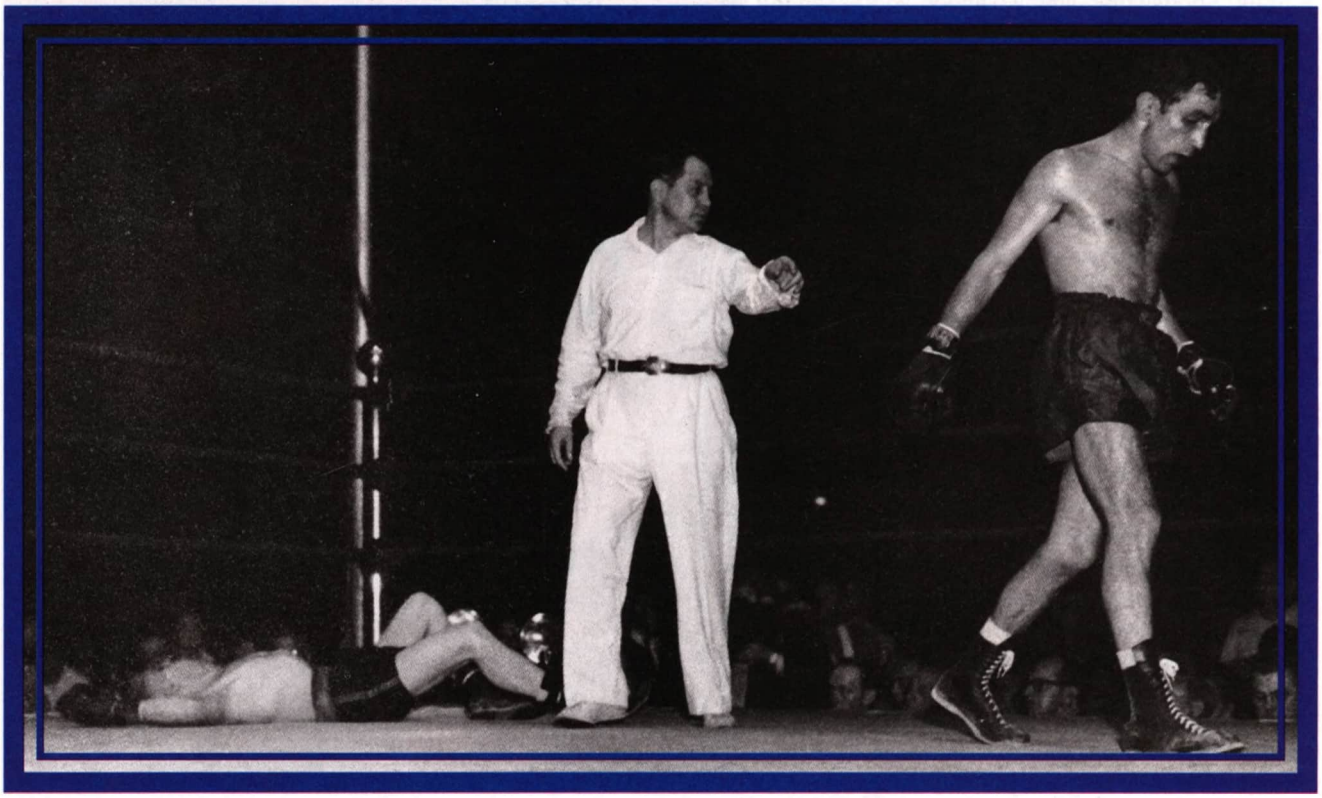
The Setup: If ever there was a fighter who rose from the ashes like a mythical phoenix, it was Pep. After a plane carrying Pep went down in the snowy woods near Carmel, New Jersey, in 1947, the reigning featherweight champion was pulled from the mess with a smashed left ankle and two fractured vertebrae. Opinions varied as to whether he would ever fight again. Six months later, with the boxing world curious about his recovery, Pep stepped into a ring in his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut, to face journeyman Victor Flores. Hugh Fullerton of the Associated Press captured the mood when he wrote, "Every manager who owns a featherweight will be on hand to see how the champion's injured leg stands up."

What Happened: "Although slightly rusty from his long layoff, Pep displayed his old-time speed as he hammered out an easy 10-round decision," reported the United Press. The referee, former featherweight king Louis "Kid" Kaplan, didn't give Flores a single round. Pep would fight for many years to come, having his final bout in 1966.

Why it Succeeded: In 1970, Pep described the comeback in a very humble way to author Peter Heller. "I had a cast on my leg and a cast on my back for five months. I took both of my casts off in May. I went back in the gym. I trained for one month ... I boxed 10 rounds with a very, very tough little Puerto Rican kid and I found out I was still able to fight." Pep describes his comeback as just another day at the office, and to his mind, that description is apt. At the time of the crash, Pep was perhaps the best pure boxer in the world, having won 109 of 110 fights. At age 25, he was still young enough to rebound from these injuries. Some believe Pep was never the same after the crash, but he was still pretty damned good.

Flores was actually from Mexico City, and was a perfect foil for the returning Pep, having lost eight of his last 10 bouts. At the time he fought Pep, Flores was on the verge of retiring. Pep, understandably, was given an easy mark for his first comeback bout.

After Flores, Pep shined up the old tools by gradually facing stronger competition, fighting six times during the months of July and August. In fact, Pep would win another 25 bouts in a row before being stopped by Sandy Saddler. Then Pep made another comeback, outpointing Saddler to regain the title in a bout chosen by THE RING as 1949's Fight of the Year. Pep would make other comebacks in his career, but none so impressive as when he resumed his career after surviving the wreck of a twin-engine DC-3.



Seven months after a near-fatal plane crash, Pep defended the featherweight title against Jock Leslie

ROCKY GRAZIANO

The Setup: Life was grim for Graziano in 1948. Not only was Graziano a 26-year-old ex-champion, having lost the middleweight title back to Tony Zale, his boxing license had been lifted in New York after his failure to report bribe offers from gangsters. When a depressed Graziano mysteriously disappeared prior to a bout with Fred Apostoli in November of that year, he told the press he was "too mixed up mentally" to train. This stunt drew the ire of the National Boxing Association. After being fined and barred from boxing in many parts of the country, it seemed "Da Rock" had hit rock bottom.

What Happened: The comeback began in Delaware, one of the few states that would have Graziano, against journeyman Bobby Claus. Claus knocked Graziano down in the first round, but Rocky got up and dropped Claus five times before the bout was stopped in round two. "I didn't know I was in a fight until I found myself on the floor," Graziano said.

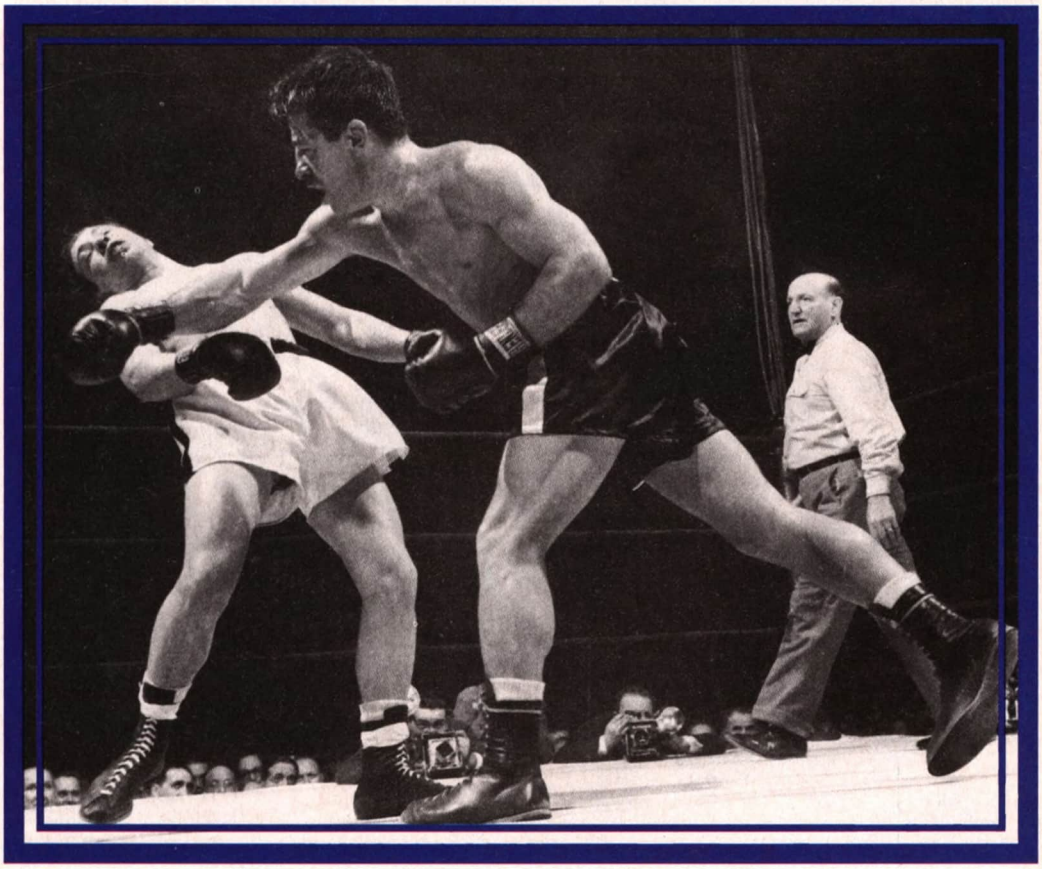
Graziano would go undefeated in his next 20 fights. Months into the comeback, thanks to a groundswell of support from the press and the public, Graziano was back in the good graces of the New York commission and the NBA. Graziano returned to the Big Apple, winning bouts at the Polo Grounds and Madison Square Garden.

The highlight of Graziano's extended comeback was the three-bout series with flashy Tony Janiro. The first bout was a draw, but Graziano took the second on points and the third by knockout. His successful run came to an end when he earned a shot at middleweight champion Sugar Ray Robinson. Graziano was kayoed in three, but not before putting Robinson on the canvas.

Why It Succeeded: A walloping right hand, a popular name, and a shrewd manager kept Graziano's comeback cooking for more than three years. Graziano was still a heavy puncher, but his manager, Irving Cohen, felt the former champ was past his prime. Cohen, noting Graziano's shaky chin and lack of style, smartly matched Graziano with smaller fighters (Charlie Fusari, Johnny Greco, Gene Burton), soft hitters (Janiro), fighters he'd already beaten (Sonny Horne), and fighters on losing streaks (Claus, Pete Mead, Honeychile Johnson, Chuck Hunter). This isn't to say Graziano fought stiffs; he fought opponents who were carefully selected.

Graziano begged Cohen to match him with Robinson, but Cohen stalled until the last moment. Why rush Graziano into Robinson's deadly hands when Graziano could be marketed all around the country? Graziano was still a big attraction, and those who hadn't seen him during his New York heyday flocked to arenas in Cleveland, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Miami, and Boston.

After losing to Robinson, Graziano lost a decision to Chuck Davey and retired. Still, Graziano's return after the lows of 1948 has to rate among the finest second acts in boxing history.



Graziano's three bouts with Janiro highlighted his comeback

SUGAR RAY ROBINSON

The Setup: You couldn't blame Robinson for retiring after losing to light heavyweight champion Joey Maxim in the summer of 1952. He'd been ahead on the scorecards, but the extreme heat in Yankee Stadium caused Robinson to collapse in his corner after 13 rounds. He promptly retired to pursue a career in show business. The gigs dried up, though, and 30 months later he returned to the ring.

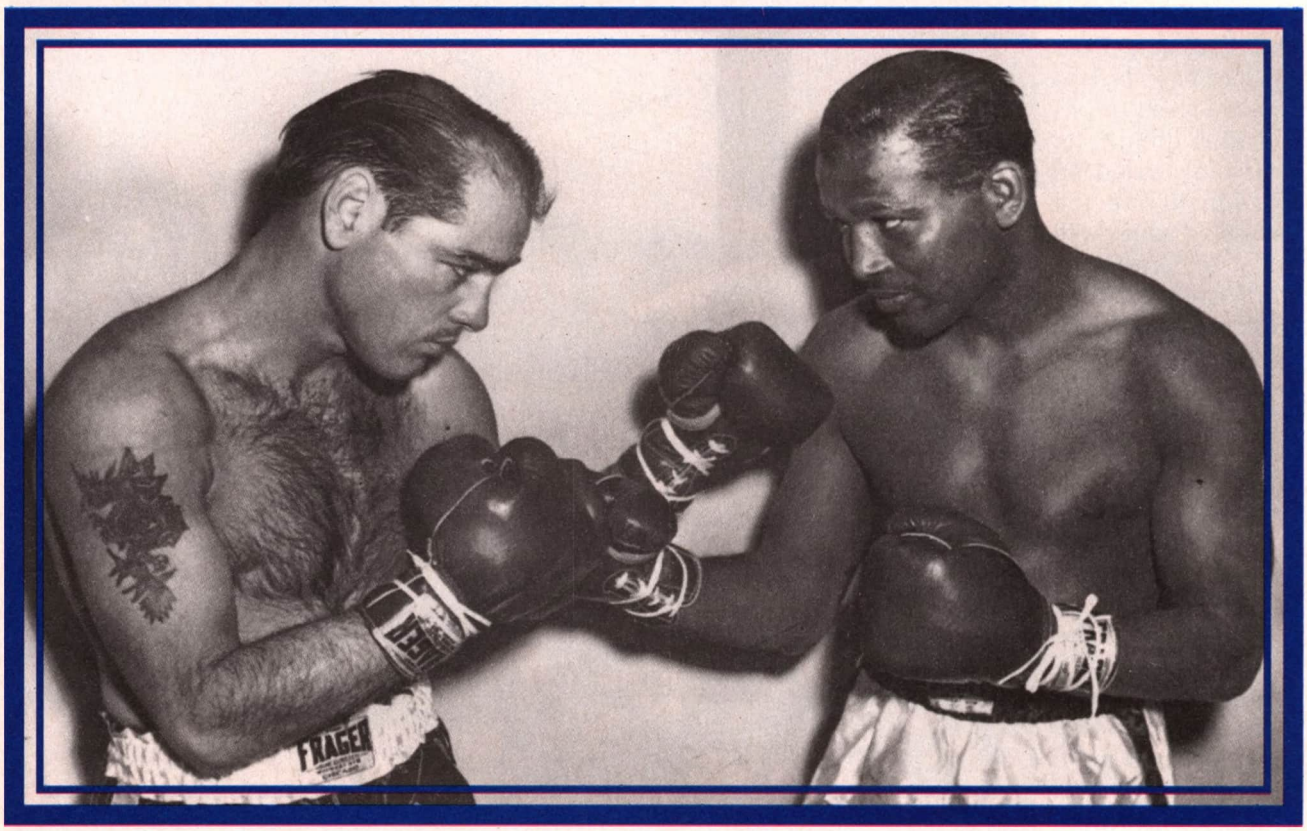
"I can use the money," Robinson told the AP, "but I'm not broke. I missed the fight crowds, the kibitzers in the dressing rooms, the guys in the gym." Years later he told Dave Anderson of *The New York Times*, "My taxes were unpaid, my stock portfolio was virtually worthless."

What Happened: Robinson returned to boxing in January 1955. Joe Rindone was an easy first opponent, but Ralph "Tiger" Jones beat Robinson on points, and Johnny Lombardo nearly did the same. Robinson's handlers urged him to retire again. By November, Robinson was hobbling on a bum ankle, his wife had suffered a miscarriage, and the government had tagged him with an $87,000 federal tax lien.

In December, however, in front of 12,441 rocking fans at Chicago Stadium, Robinson kayoed middleweight champion Bobo Olson to regain the title, becoming the first man regain a title he'd relinquished, and the first to wear the middleweight crown three times. "Not even I was sure if I could win back the championship," Robinson said, near tears. "It's almost like a miracle." Robinson often referred to this win as the most satisfying of his career. *New York Post* columnist Jimmy Cannon called Robinson's return "the most thrilling and profitable comeback in all the seasons of sports."

Why It Succeeded: Many in his camp believed he was done as a fighter, but Robinson credited his long-suffering wife, Edna Mae, with turning him in the right direction. In his autobiography, Robinson recalled her saying, "You look like you're trying to knock out everybody. You're so anxious to fight again, you just want to show everybody how great you once were by knocking out all of your opponents. You're not using the bag of tricks that made you great." Robinson took her advice and in succession defeated Ted Olla, Garth Panter, and Rocky Castellani, improving with each performance. It was no longer a mere comeback; it was a restoration.

The convenience of Olson rising to the championship while Robinson was away can't be discounted. Robinson knew Olson well, having beaten him twice in the past, once by knockout and once on points. Olson, believing 34-year-old Robinson was now shopworn, elected to swap punches in their third bout. Olson walked into an uppercut and was counted out at 2:51 of round two.



Robinson squares off with Olson prior to their 1955 title bout

VICENTE SALDIVAR

The Setup: After making seven defenses of the featherweight title, 24-year-old Saldivar retired as champion on October 14, 1967. Saldivar's reason: He wanted to live like other people. By 1969, bored by inactivity, he began thinking about a comeback.

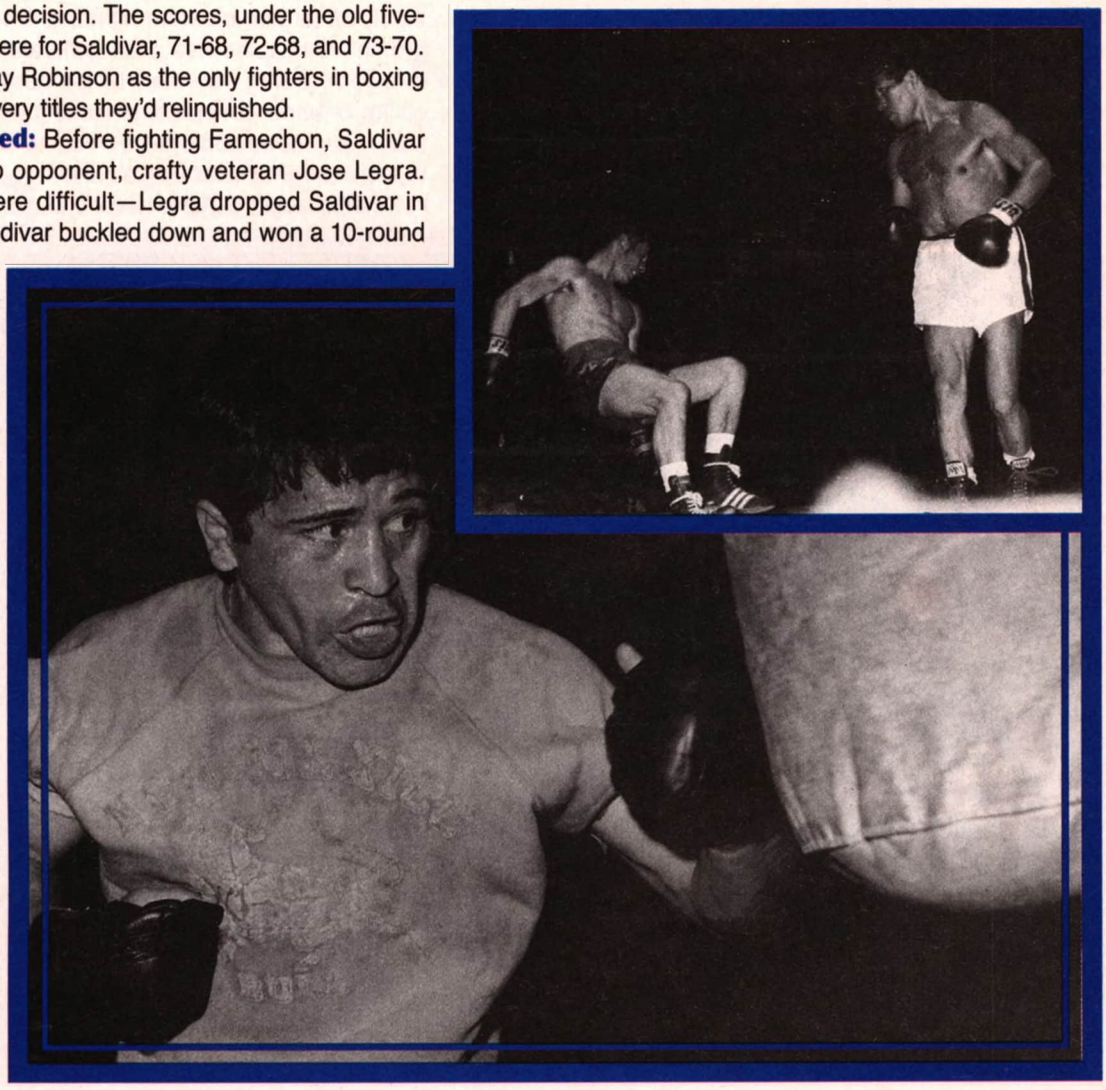
What Happened: In Saldivar's absence, Johnny Famechon won a series of elimination bouts and was declared the new WBC featherweight titlist. At the Palazzo Dello Sport, in Rome, Italy, pint-sized southpaw Saldivar challenged Famechon for the crown that he'd once worn. Saldivar's early onslaught was hellacious, as he threw a steady barrage to Famechon's head and body. Saldivar scored a knockdown in the eighth, but Famechon rose and gamely fought back. Saldivar's corner had fully expected Famechon to wilt under Saldivar's attack, and was quite surprised when the defending champion stayed the distance. Despite Famechon's late rally, Saldivar triumphed via 15-round unanimous decision. The scores, under the old five-point-must system, were for Saldivar, 71-68, 72-68, and 73-70.

Saldivar joined Ray Robinson as the only fighters in boxing history to regain the very titles they'd relinquished.

Why It Succeeded: Before fighting Famechon, Saldivar took a tough tuneup opponent, crafty veteran Jose Legra. The early rounds were difficult—Legra dropped Saldivar in round three—but Saldivar buckled down and won a 10-round decision. Saldivar no longer had the power that had earned him comparisons to the great sluggers of the past, but in beating Legra he showed he could still grind away at an opponent's body with machine-like concentration. So impressive was Saldivar's win that promoters immediately approached him to fight Famechon.

Beating Legra was helpful in shaking out the cobwebs, but another key to Saldivar's success was that Famechon happened to be ready for a fall. A Frenchman by way of Australia, "Fammo" had rarely fought outside his adopted hometown of Melbourne. He was not a big puncher, having scored only 20 knockouts, and many of his recent wins had been close and controversial. Famechon was also weary of the sport—he retired immediately after Saldivar beat him. Saldivar was fortunate that it was Famechon, and not a more formidable fighter, standing in his way of the title. THE RING's correspondent, J.A. Tree, commented that "Saldivar was good enough to win decisively, but he was not quite the Saldivar of his original tenure ..."

Indeed, seven months later, the very ordinary Kuniaki Shibata beat Saldivar in his first title defense. Still, Saldivar's comeback would have to be considered a major success. Regaining the title was probably enough to earn him his 1999 induction to the International Boxing Hall of Fame. As Tree noted in 1970, "And so it is Saldivar, it is Robinson, and it is nobody else. Nobody else in any fistic division."



Saldivar trains for his title-winning comeback against Famechon (inset)

KOSTYA TSZYU

The Setup: Tszyu was on the verge of a major fight with Oscar De La Hoya when he lost via shocking 10th-round TKO to "Cool" Vince Phillips. It had been a traumatic experience for Tszyu, with reporter Ron Dicker writing in *The New York Times* that Tszyu "was left sobbing into his hands in the Trump Taj Mahal dressing room, wondering how to regain the momentum he had surrendered in a crushing defeat."

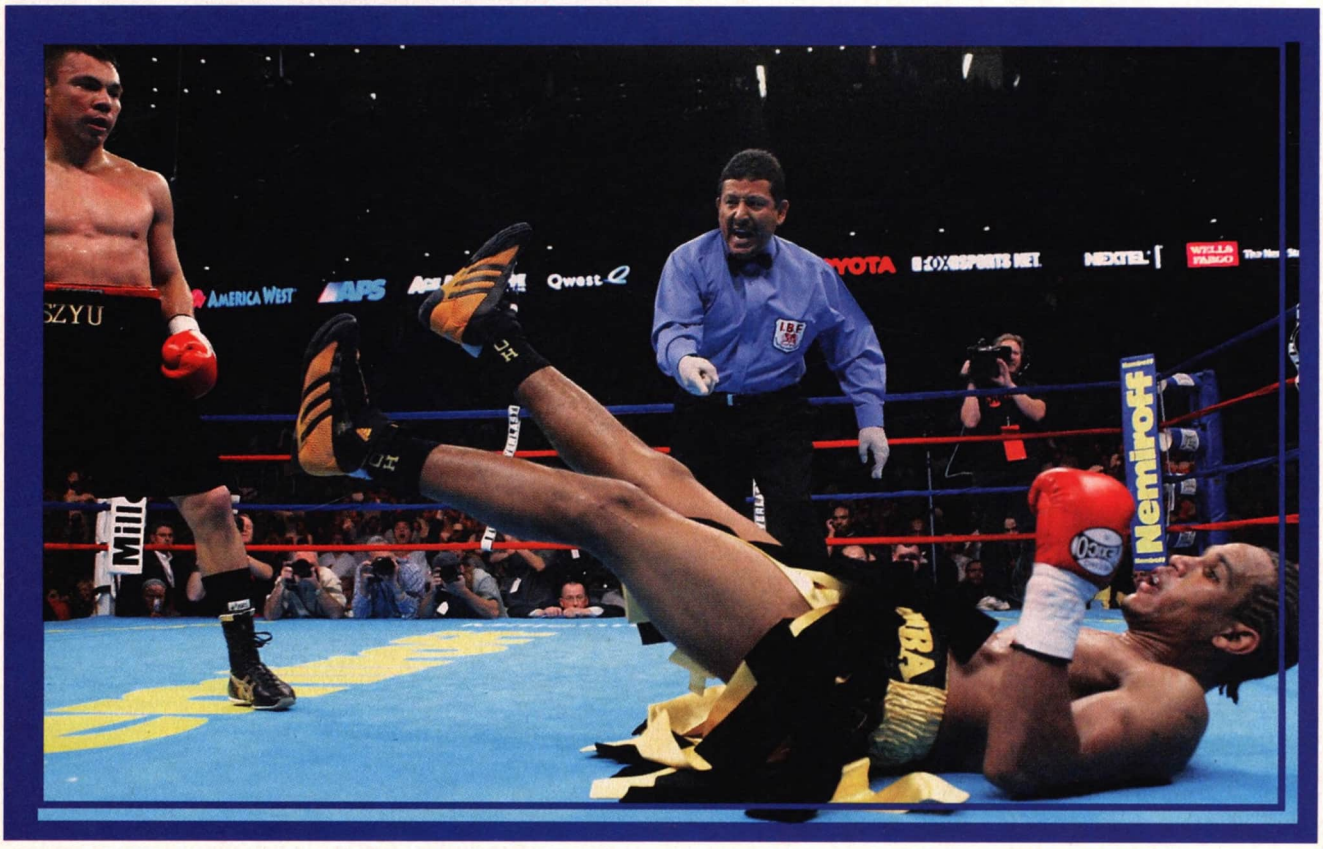
With many believing he had been overrated, Tszyu began the long trip back to respectability. Had he been fighting in the 1930s or '40s, a single loss wouldn't have meant so much, but in 1997, with major paydays in his future, the loss to underdog Phillips was devastating.

What Happened: Seven months after losing to Phillips, Tszyu began a stirring comeback. During the next several years he defeated a gang of 140-pounders, including Calvin Grove, Rafael Ruelas, Diosbelys Hurtado, Miguel Angel Gonzales, an aging Julio Cesar Chavez, Sharmba Mitchell (twice), Zab Judah, Ben Tackie, and Jesse James Leija. Along the way he won the WBC, IBF, and WBA titles, along with recognition by THE RING as world champion. Tszyu never fought De La Hoya, but he did win 13 in a row before losing the championship to Ricky Hatton, and will be remembered as one of the top 140-pounders of all-time. THE RING acknowledged his achievements after the Phillips bout, choosing Tszyu as 1998's Comeback of the Year.

Why It Succeeded: Tszyu often sounded like a scientist who practiced boxing in a laboratory rather than a gym. Tzsyu rarely discussed his training in detail, talking only about secret punches being developed, and his monk-like dedication to his sport. When asked by reporters how he bounced back from the loss to Phillips, he talked dryly about how determined and "mentally strong" he was, and how his loyal Australian fans stood behind him. When eastsideboxing.com asked what changes were made after the Phillips debacle, Tszyu responded tersely: "Preparation. I become a professional athlete. From that day I changed everything in my preparation. Everything. Some part of my team were gone. And that's a difference."

Perhaps it was just hard work and changes to his team that helped him reach the pinnacle again. Perhaps an adjustment in attitude was also needed. Tszyu had been a highly decorated amateur fighter and was undefeated as a pro. In Australia he was already heralded as a national hero in bloom. Going into the Phillips bout he may have been cocky, or under-prepared, or looking ahead. Tszyu said at a Manhattan news conference, "I came to this country for one reason: to fight Oscar De La Hoya."

Phillips taught Tszyu to never underestimate an opponent.



Tszyu won 13 in a row after losing to Phillips, including this 2004 TKO of Mitchell

FIVE THAT FAILED

JAMES J. JEFFRIES

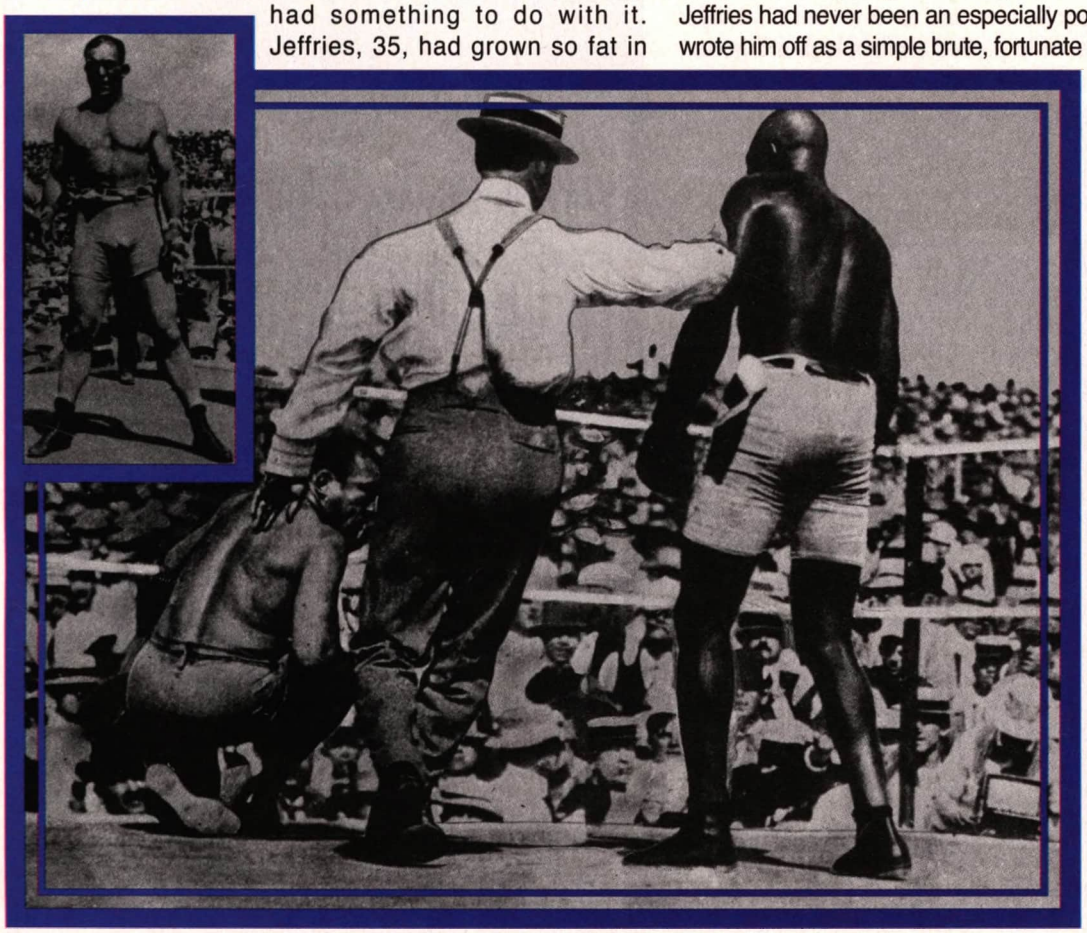
The Setup: Jeffries, the former heavyweight champion, answered America's call for a white hope to challenge the brash new champion, Jack Johnson, an African-American. Since Jeffries had retired undefeated, Johnson relished the opportunity to fight the man whom many regarded as the real champion. Meanwhile, Jeffries was living the comfortable life of a retired athlete, spending most of his time on his alfalfa farm or making appearances at the saloon he owned. Thanks to intense media hype, by the time of the fight, Jeffries' image had grown comparable to that of a returning king.

What Happened: The most widely discussed bout of the era took place outdoors in Reno, Nevada, under a hazy, Fourth of July sun. Johnson handed Jeffries a grim beating, finally stopping him in the 15th round. Jeffries' final moments, slumping to the canvas in defeat, created an unfortunate image for fighters which has lasted nearly a century: Those attempting comebacks may end up like Jeffries.

Why It Failed: Five years on an alfalfa farm probably had something to do with it. Jeffries, 35, had grown so fat in retirement that just getting into fighting trim was a major chore. He shed nearly 70 pounds, and by the day of the fight, although he'd lost some hair during his retirement, he looked to be an impressive physical specimen. But as so many fighters have learned, looks can be deceiving. Jeffries, who had always been a plodding, bear-like fighter, simply lacked the speed to deal with Johnson. After his long retirement and the draining weight-loss regimen, he moved like a dinosaur stuck in quicksand.

Meanwhile, Johnson was very near his prime. He wasn't quite the sleek, powerful boxing master who'd whipped Tommy Burns 19 months earlier in Australia, but he was still in very good form. He peppered Jeffries with jabs and uppercuts, tearing the "Boilermaker's" face to ribbons. When Jeffries tried to clinch with Johnson, he was too out of breath to handle the infighting.

Jeffries' return to the ring was more complicated than most. Despite his long reign as champion and his bulldog courage, Jeffries had never been an especially popular champion. Many wrote him off as a simple brute, fortunate to be so much younger and larger than his challengers. Although Jeffries stood to make a quarter of a million dollars for this comeback, he may have been lured back by the thought of suddenly becoming a hero, for beating Johnson would finally win him America's heart. Author Jack London, who had covered Johnson's title win in 1908, uttered the catchphrase of the year prior to the fight: "It's up to you, Jeff." The pressure of having the weight of a nation on his back, along with Johnson's formidable skill, was more than any gentleman farmer could be expected to handle.



Jeffries looked in great shape (inset), but Johnson handled him with ease

JACK DEMPSEY

Setup: Heavyweight champion Dempsey was the most famous fighter on the planet, but he hadn't fought in three years, preferring to act in movies and attend Hollywood parties with his wife, actress Estelle Taylor. The former hobo even paused to get a nose job from one of Tinsel Town's finest plastic surgeons.

Meanwhile, leading contender Gene Tunney was a skillful fighter who had only lost once in 81 fights. Promoter Tex Rickard brought the bout to Philadelphia's Sesquicentennial Stadium, where 120,557 fans sat spellbound during a steady September rain as one of the great sporting events of the Roaring Twenties unfolded.

Despite his time away, many predicted Dempsey would win. "It has been said that any man Dempsey can hit he can knock out," offered S.W. Nash of the *New York Daily Herald*. "Undoubtedly, Tunney will be hit."

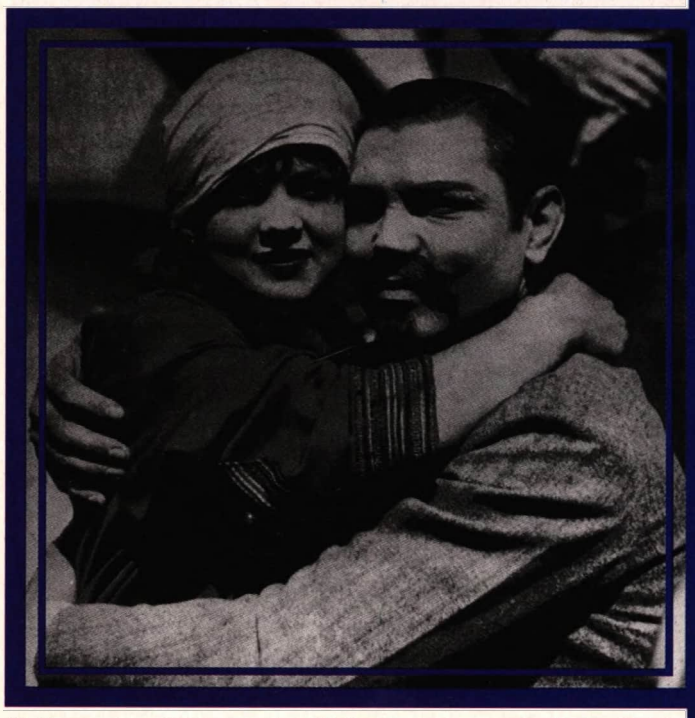
What Happened: Dempsey lost the championship to Tunney via lopsided 10-round decision. After the bout, his face swollen and discolored, Dempsey told the International News Service: "I just wasn't there. I couldn't deliver." To his wife he said, "Honey, I just forgot to duck."

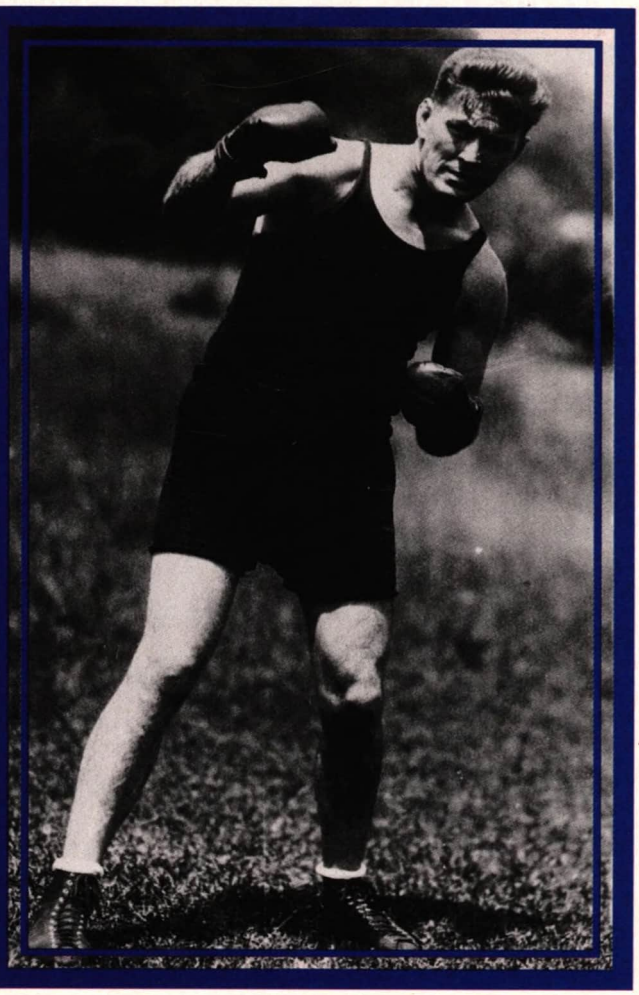
Why It Failed: As Dempsey soaked up Tunney's punches, his former manager, Jack Kearns, said to New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker, "He's shot to pieces and his legs are gone." Hollywood has a way of taking a fighter's legs, even a young one like Dempsey, who was not yet 30. Kearns observed in a syndicated column that Dempsey forgot his old swaying style, and was simply walking in, his face an easy target. Years later in his autobiography, Dempsey would write that he could no longer fearlessly absorb counterpunches; everything Tunney threw bothered him.

Leading up to the bout, Dempsey was plagued by lawsuits, most brought on by a nasty break from Kearns. For the first time in his career, Dempsey did all of his own negotiating for the Tunney bout. Some wondered if this was a distraction. Dempsey later said managing himself was a mistake, and suggested Kearns might've forced him to take a tuneup bout.

Ring rust and legal problems were not the only factors in Dempsey's downfall. Tunney had been studying Dempsey for years. Tunney had decided the best way to beat Dempsey was to time his rushes with short, well-placed right hands. Tunney worked on his right hand constantly. He'd even stop during golf games to turn and throw a quick right at an imaginary Dempsey. As early as round one, Tunney knew his obsessive work had paid off. "I practiced that punch, and it clicked the first time I used it." Tunney added, "I never hit a man harder nor more squarely on the target I was aiming at."

For Dempsey, the loss had a surprise upside. As a result of his good-natured acceptance of defeat, his popularity soared.





Making movies with Florence Lee didn't prepare Dempsey for Tunney (right)

The Setup: At various times in Ali's career he'd returned from a three-year exile, a broken jaw, and embarrassing losses. Now, one year after a degrading loss to Larry Holmes, Ali was attempting to shock the world one more time. Ali blamed the Holmes defeat on thyroid pills that had left him depleted, and talked about winning the heavyweight title for an unprecedented fourth time. Trevor Berbick was to be his tuneup.

The bout was controversial. New York and Nevada wouldn't license Ali, the networks balked at the fight, and long-time Ali watchers worried about his health. Still, despite the sense of gloom surrounding the event, Ali did his best to whip up interest.

"He who has no imagination stands on the earth," Ali said. "Columbus had imagination, the Wright brothers had imagination. People are worried about me, more worried than when Evel Knievel was gonna jump the Grand Canyon, more worried than when the astronauts went off into space. More worried than when some blind man climbed a mountain. I'm not worried. I'm only worried Berbick won't show up. I'm worried he'll get bit by a dog." Then Ali, one month shy of 40, offered this *bon mot*: "Age is just mind over matter. If you don't mind, it don't matter."

What Happened: In a rickety baseball stadium in the Bahamas, Ali lost a 10-round decision. Berbick told the press, "I tried to take him out early with one to the jaw, but I couldn't, and then I decided I didn't want to hurt him."

Why It Failed: Ali entered the ring to fight Berbick at a jiggly 237, the heaviest of his career. Although he landed a few punches here and there, he seemed lifeless. He tried to contain Berbick by clinching, but lacked the physical strength to hold the younger man. Berbick, a sturdy contender who would one day be the WBC heavyweight titlist, concentrated on punishing Ali's ribs.

While many were dismayed by Ali's comeback, no one should've been surprised. He'd dragged his sorry old chassis into the ring nine times after the conflict with Joe Frazier in Manila. Of course, he would return after Holmes. To understand Ali is to think of this bout with Berbick: Not even the obvious deterioration of his body could dissuade his inner belief in himself. Sadly, the mind could no longer jump-start the flesh.

"Father Time caught up with me," Ali rasped at the end. "In my younger days I wouldn't have had any trouble. But I just couldn't do what I wanted to do." When asked if his skills may be eroding, he answered, "It's not, 'may have' gone; they *have* gone!"

Holmes hadn't convinced Ali that it was time to leave the race; he needed Berbick to carry him gently to the finish line.

Berbick and jowly Ali meet the media the day after their fight

RAY MANCINI

The Setup: After two violent losses to Livingstone Bramble, Mancini embarked on a happy retirement. He worked sporadically in movies and on television, and seemed content. Hector Camacho, though, had been a long-time irritant.

"I had a lot of other offers to come back, but this was the only guy I really wanted," Mancini said. "I just don't dig this guy at all."

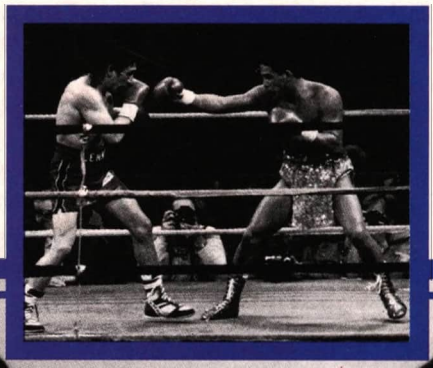
Even though it should've happened years earlier, Camacho-Mancini actually created a small buzz in the boxing world. Camacho, a flashy, undefeated southpaw, kept the bad blood going. "I'd never want to be Mancini. He's too goody-goody," said Camacho, a 3-1 favorite. But Camacho was not exactly a destroyer in the ring, and no one was fretting over Mancini's health, especially not Mancini.

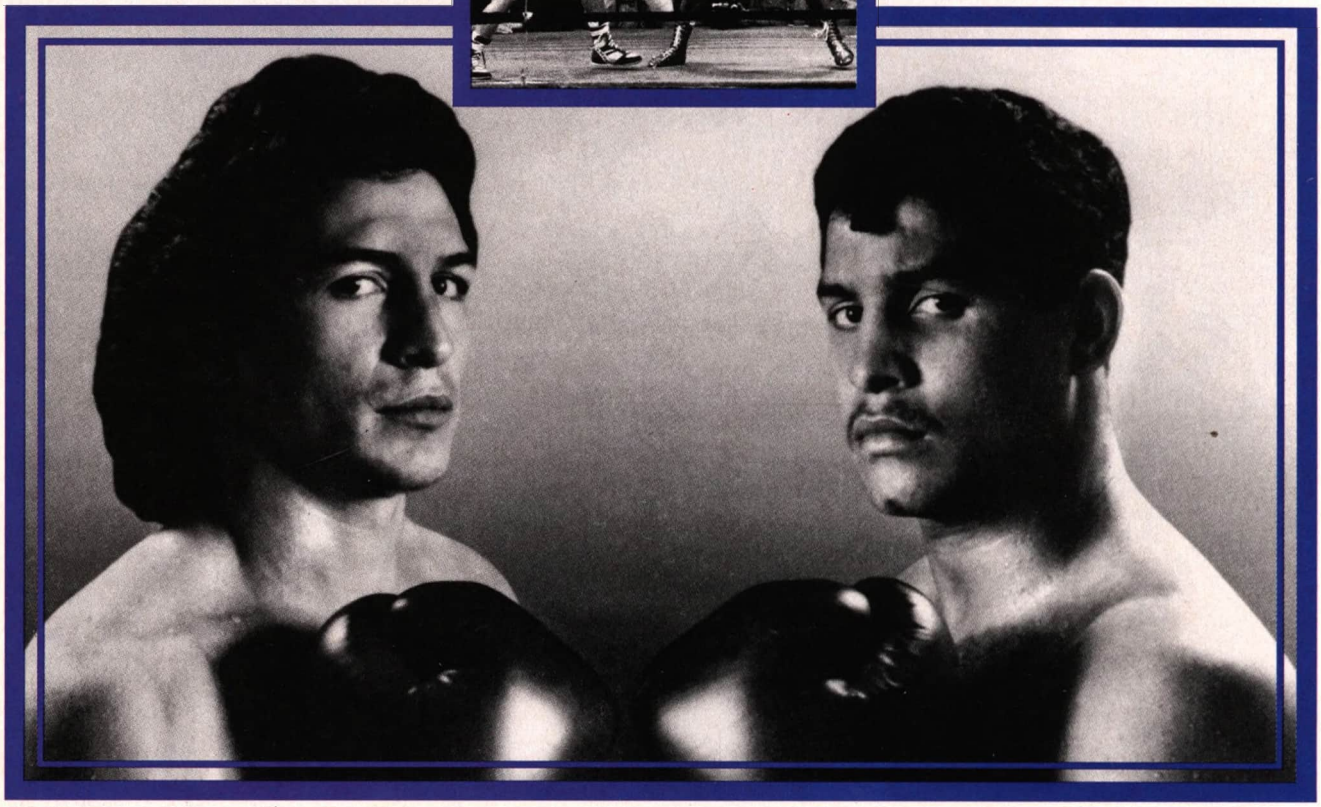
"Most fighters, boxing chews them up and spits them out," he said. "But not me. I don't ever let boxing use me. I use boxing for my own purposes." His purposes, some speculated, involved his flagging acting career. This return to the ring would pocket Mancini the biggest payday of his career.

What Happened: Mancini was game, but lost a 12-round split decision. The crowd of 11,519 at Reno's Lawlor Events Center was largely for Mancini, and the split verdict was jeered loudly for several minutes. Mancini's fans threw cups, drinks, and other debris into the ring, believing he'd done enough to win. Mancini concurred. "In my heart, I won that fight," he said. "I went out and performed like I wanted to. It wasn't pretty by any means. I just had to get the fight done. I've been out of the ring a long time."

Why It Failed: At his best, Mancini was a tough little scrapper, but even though he was enormously popular and held the WBA lightweight title for a while, he was never at the sport's elite level. His losses to Bramble, and Alexis Arguello before that, showed his limitations. Camacho, although labeled an underachiever who could occasionally be timid in the ring, was actually a sharp fighter with a good understanding of the Sweet Science. Even if they had met four years earlier, the outcome wouldn't have been much different. Camacho was simply too smart and too fast. Few have been better than Camacho at controlling a fight, landing enough jabs to win a round, dictating the pace, and not getting hit. It didn't always please the audience, but it worked. As the Associated Press reported, "Camacho parried and retreated with the poise of a matador."

There was talk of a rematch, but it never happened. Instead, Mancini returned to the ring three years later to face Greg Haugen, with disastrous results, getting stopped in the seventh round.





Mancini was confident when he came back to fight Camacho, but lost an unpopular decision

The Setup: Leonard had been the comeback kid on more than one occasion. By 1991 he was 34, and still looking for new worlds to conquer.

Part of Leonard's mystique was that he only fought occasionally, and marketed his bouts as major events. During the later part of his career he was simply recycling opponents from his past, such as Thomas Hearns and Roberto Duran. In fact, before Terry Norris was ultimately chosen as his first Madison Square Garden opponent, Leonard had hoped for a third bout with Hearns. Negotiations failed—Hearns could not agree upon the weight Leonard wanted—and Norris got the call.

"Hopefully, he'll freeze in front of all the people who come to the Garden that night," Leonard said. "That's my edge. But it may make him fight better."

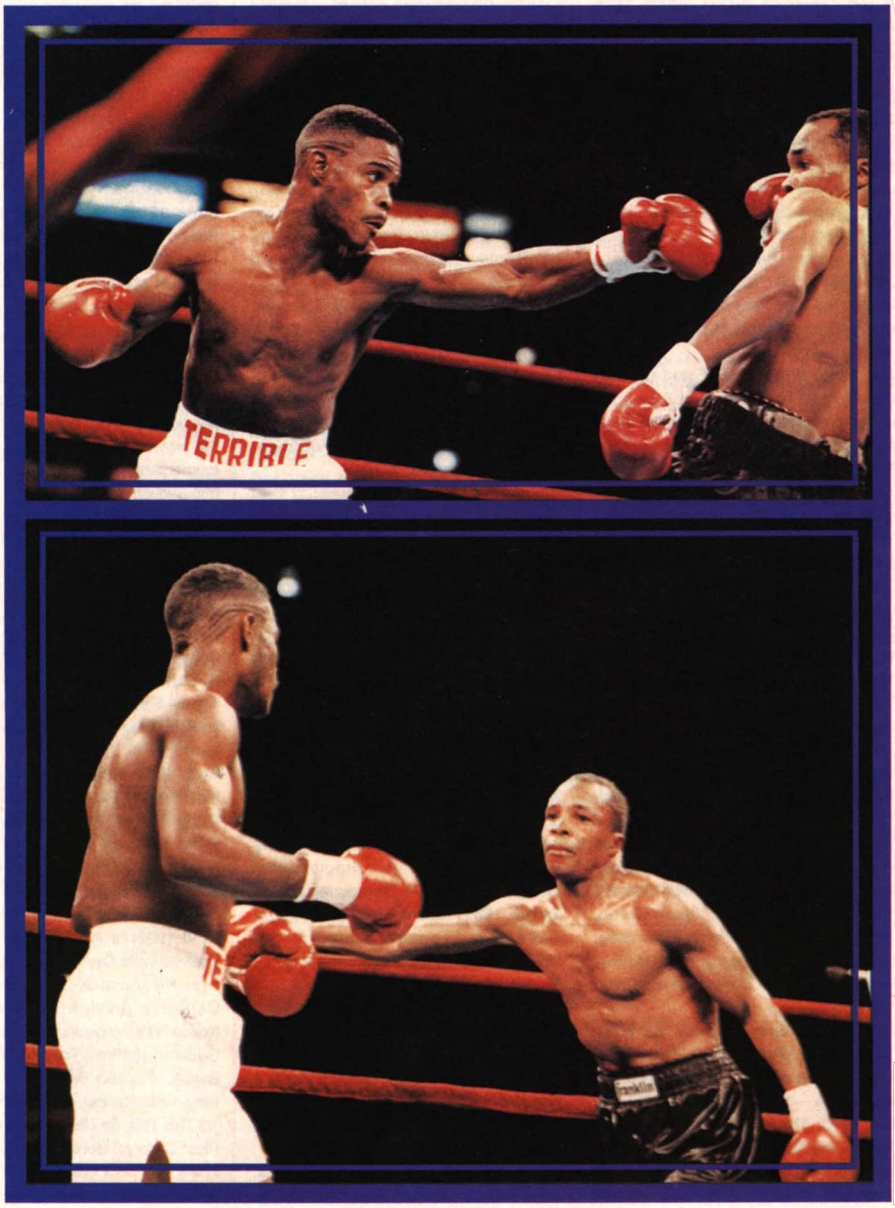
What Happened: Leonard was dropped twice on his way to a humiliating 12-round decision loss. "It just wasn't there," Leonard said. "I was the fighter of the '70s and '80s, but not the '90s."

Why It Failed: Norris was a 23 year old with quick hands, and even though he was somewhat erratic throughout his career, he was a gifted fighter. He was also smart, not falling for any of Leonard's old routines. Part of the problem with being as famous as Leonard is that eventually people not only know what you can do, they know how you do it. "I had studied Ray's tapes closely, and learned my lessons," Norris said. Norris beat Leonard at every turn. When Leonard tried to lay on the ropes and counter, Norris ignored him. When Leonard did land a blow, Norris responded with two or three shots of his own. Leonard, in a way, was like an old standup comic, and Norris knew the jokes long before they were told.

Leonard was not only facing a fresh young opponent for the first time in years, he was doing it at junior middleweight, when his last several bouts had been at 160 and above. Weighing 154, Leonard looked dried out and thin. Norris, the reigning WBA titlist, was comfortable and strong at the weight. As *The New York Times'* Phil Berger noted, "The raised left shoulder to ward off punches not yet thrown and the slightly sheepish expression on his face signaled that Leonard knew only too well that he was up against more firepower than he expected."

By the time the bout was over, Leonard looked 54, not 34. Leonard may have been misled by his previous fight, an easy 12-round win over an even older Duran. By outslicking a thick-legged Duran, Leonard may have conned himself into believing he still had his best stuff. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Massachusetts and a regular contributor to THE RING.



PHOTOS BY AL BELLO

Norris had an easy time with comebacking Leonard

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David Haye

"To Be The Best, You Have To Beat Both Klitschko Brothers"

In an ultra-modern gym at the rear of a scrap metal yard nestled between olive groves and Kyrenia's rugged mountain range in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a British heavyweight has been hard at work. David Haye, 28 years old, 6'3" and 215 pounds, is getting ready to challenge 6'6½", 245-pound colossus Wladimir Klitschko for the IBF heavyweight title, sooner rather than later, he hopes.

Since relinquishing the world cruiserweight title that he won in 2007 by knocking out Frenchman Jean-Marc Mormeck in the seventh round in the Parisian suburb of Levallois-Perret, the south Londoner has launched his assault on the big men by knocking out Monte Barrett in the fifth round last November at the O2 Arena in London. From Phaintin' Phil Scott—whose series of groin-clutching collapses in the 1920s earned him an unflattering sobriquet and a succession of wins by disqualification—to Don Cockell, Brian London, Henry Cooper, Joe Bugner, and Richard Dunn, Britain has produced a succession of heavyweight losers. Tommy Farr was another, but he displayed heroic resistance for 15 rounds against Joe Louis, whereas Frank Bruno only briefly reigned as WBC titleholder before Mike Tyson slaughtered him for the second time. Bob Fitzsimmons and Lennox Lewis, Britain's world heavyweight champions at the end of the 19th century and 20th century, respectively, broke the mold.

So why might Haye light up today's somber heavyweight scene?

Clearly, he has prodigious power and a finisher's instinct. In 22 bouts, he has won 20 by knockout. He can generate speed and excitement in equal measure and, physically and athletically, he looks the part.

Haye betrays a hint of vulnerability too. Unheralded African super middleweight Lolenga Mock had Haye in trouble in his seventh fight before Haye rallied and prevailed in the fourth round. Carl Thompson stopped him in the fifth round in 2004. Even Barrett induced moments of anxiety in a wild slugfest, dropping Haye with a left hook in round five before he delivered another left hook while Haye was on the floor, which cost the American a point and gave the Briton more time to recover. Seconds later, the fight was over, Haye ending it with an emphatic left-right-left combination to the jaw that put Barrett on his back and elevated the victor to a position of stature in the mediocre heavyweight division.

A heavyweight title shot beckoned, but, as this issue went to print, Haye was uncertain about Wladimir Klitschko's immediate intentions after Vitali Klitschko had changed his mind about fighting him. THE RING's European correspondent Brian Doogan, who spoke to Haye in early-January, reports:

"Haye has an opportunity to demonstrate that he is the coming man in British boxing and that he can also enliven the heavyweight scene, which is in urgent need of stimulation. He is a bright, engaging personality, unafraid to speak his mind, and, as a cruiserweight, he was able to back up the talk. The question is whether he will be able to do so at heavyweight and how soon he will be given the chance."

The Ring: Can you explain to us just how we have come to this point, where a bout between you and Wladimir Klitschko appeared to be imminently on your horizon, then it switched to you against Vitali, and now it looks like you and Wladimir again?

David Haye: The way it looks to me is that Vitali had his big coming-out party against Sam Peter, he got a flavor for it again and he wanted the best fight out there, which means boxing me. I went over to Germany for Wladimir against Hasim Rahman and [manager] Adam [Booth] and I thought we would be negotiating to fight Wladimir. But big brother decided to step in ahead of kid brother. We spoke that night and agreed to the fight. The fine detail had still to be worked out, but in principle everything was agreed for a fight in June at an outdoor venue in London. Obviously, this didn't look good for Wladimir. It was like his big brother was telling him, "Okay, you fight that fat dude, Chris Arreola, and I'll take care of the most dangerous heavyweight out there, David Haye." I don't know how it sits between the

PHOTO COURTESY OF SETANTA SPORTS

PHOTO BY THOMAS LOHNES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

"If I fight Vitali or Wladimir, that encounter will bring kudos, excitement, and accolades back to heavyweight boxing, which is what the division needs badly right now. I'm positive that I will fight one or both of the brothers before this year is over."

brothers, but there is family politics involved, obviously. Bernd Boente, the Klitschkos' manager, contacted Adam and said that Vitali would be at the Barrett fight and he wanted to fight me. We knew then that his mandatory challenger was Juan Carlos Gomez, but they said this fight would be bigger and that Vitali would be willing to sacrifice the WBC belt to make it happen. Obviously, I would prefer to be in a title fight, but I would fight him whether or not the title is on the line because, if I beat him, I will be recognized as one of the top two heavyweights in the world. Unfortunately, the WBC insisted that Vitali had to box his mandatory against Gomez next, and he went back on our agreement, which left me and Adam having to go back to Wladimir, who was our main target in the first place.

Talks are ongoing. If Wladimir does fight Arreola, you'll have one guy who is in tremendous shape facing another guy who is fat and unattractive, and this would be following a fight in which he beat "Has-been" Rahman, who is over the hill and the bout went unnoticed to all but hardcore boxing fans.

If I fight Vitali or Wladimir, that encounter will bring kudos, excitement, and accolades back to heavyweight boxing, which is what the division needs badly right now. I'm positive that I will fight one or both of the brothers before this year is over.

The Ring: You confronted Wladimir last year when he came to London, and in a heated exchange on the steps of the O2 Arena you tried to get under his skin and he told you that you would have to get in line.

DH: I shook Wladimir's hand in London and, through the coverage we picked up on TV, in newspapers, and on the Internet, he realized how big a fight this would be. He told me, if I got myself ranked high enough, we would fight, so I went and knocked out Monte Barrett and got that ranking.

There is no more dangerous challenge out there for either of the Klitschko brothers than me. The sooner they get their heads around this, the better it will be for boxing. I know what I want to do and that is face the best competition available. To be the best, you have to beat both Klitschko brothers and this is what I intend to do.

The Ring: They may share the same blood, but they are quite different fighters. How do you compare the Klitschko brothers?

DH: Wladimir is the more natural athlete of the two. For example, he would win a 100-meter race between the two of them because he's faster. But Vitali is the tougher fighter and he's proved this over the years. He's stronger, too, but Wladimir has a lot more hand speed and his defense is better, though Vitali has the better chin. Wladimir is very gun-shy, whereas Vitali is not afraid to take two punches in order to hit his opponent with one. He slugged it out with Lennox Lewis and, although the cuts and injuries around his left eye caused his face to be in a mess, he was still there at the end of six rounds, even though the doctor stopped it. Both guys are dangerous in their own right, but I can outwit and outwork them.

The Ring: Why are you so convinced that you can beat them? A lot of people might draw the obvious conclusion that you are simply too small to beat either guy.

DH: When was the last time they had to fight a guy who was motivated, a guy who came to the ring in shape and hungry and showed the necessary will to win? The last time Wladimir faced this kind of opponent, he got knocked out by Lamon Brewster, and the last time for

Vitali was against Lennox when he lost on cuts. The guys they have been fighting lately were not on the up, guys like Tony Thompson, who brought no passion to his fight with Wladimir, and Ray Austin, who is a nonentity. Sam Peter was hopeless against Vitali, absolutely hopeless. He was fat, out of shape, and his plan seemed to be to walk straight through Vitali's punches. Most of these guys were petrified facing the Klitschkos, and these fights could never excite the public because they weren't competitive.

A lot of the American challengers have never boxed outside of the U.S. before and it was too much for them to be fighting in Germany, but I have boxed in the U.S. and all over Europe as an amateur and as a professional, and I have the experience. No one has had to pad out my record, which is what has made me into the fighter I am today.

The Ring: So you've decided that it's best to go for it all right away.

DH: I could have had another 20 fights unbeaten, but that wouldn't make a better fighter. It would only give me a false sense of security and would be a waste of my time and everybody else's. I have only had two fights at heavyweight, against Tomasz Bonin and Monte Barrett, but I'm established as a bona fide challenger, which demonstrates how dangerous I am and shows that the route I have taken was the right one. I haven't wasted my time with fighters I would be odds-on to beat. The TV networks in America are not interested in that. They love my high-risk strategy. I put it on the line like nobody else in boxing does. The best way to learn, I have always believed, is to throw yourself in at the deep end.

The Ring: You don't seem at all concerned about the fact that you are a small heayweight.

DH: Heavyweights will think I'm a small guy, but when they see me at the weigh-in they are going to realize that I'm a heavyweight. I have always been a heavyweight coming down to cruiser, even though people think I have to bulk up to heavyweight.

Evander Holyfield has always been my inspiration and I believe that his achievement means a lot more than

Although he has fought only twice as a heavyweight, most recently scoring a fifth-round kayo of Monte Barrett in November 2008 (pictured), former world cruiserweight champion Haye believes he is ready to take on and defeat the division's elite.

PHOTO BY CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Wladimir Klitschko's, who is 6'6" and has always been bigger than everybody he has fought, naturally heavier and with a longer reach. He has always had the advantages. Holyfield has had to work for every inch in the ring. Every punch he lands he has had to work that much harder to get close to land his shot, so you have to give them credit. Tyson was 5'11". He wasn't a big guy. If Tyson were around now, they would write him off as being too small. I will be a smaller heavyweight, but I have four inches on Tyson and I have an 81-inch reach. Klitschko's is 82 inches, so there isn't that great a difference.

The Ring: Chris Arreola is the foremost heavyweight in America and he is also on Wladimir's radar. How do you rate him?

DH: I have only watched one of his fights, against Travis Walker, so I haven't studied him. It didn't look like he has a slick defense. He just seems to put up his hands in front of his face, and I guess you don't develop his kind of features by slipping punches. You could only look like him by *taking* punches. I wouldn't lose any sleep whatsoever if I were to get in the ring with him. He is carrying at least 30 pounds of surplus weight.

If Usain Bolt, the Olympic Games 100 meters and 200 meters champion and world record holder, came to the running track 30 pounds overweight, he would run an all-time slow, and boxing is no different. You can't afford for your body fat level to be the same percentage as a beef jerky.

The Ring: What about WBA heavyweight titleholder Nikolay Valuev, who recently beat Evander Holyfield on a controversial majority decision in Switzerland? Is that a fight that you might pursue?

DH: I thought that Holyfield beat him easily. For someone who is 46 to be able to run rings around you and set traps for you, it doesn't say a lot for your credentials. Valuev is a novelty and he is not to be taken seriously. If Valuev had not been given the WBA title because Ruslan Chagaev was stripped, no one would even be mentioning him now. This is a guy who couldn't beat John Ruiz convincingly, which Roy Jones, a light heavyweight, did easily.

The Ring: Alexander Povetkin from Russia, the mandatory challenger for the IBF heavyweight title, struggled to overcome Eddie Chambers in an eliminator last year, but he is one of the leading contenders, capable of giving any heavyweight in the world a competitive fight. What are your thoughts on Povetkin?

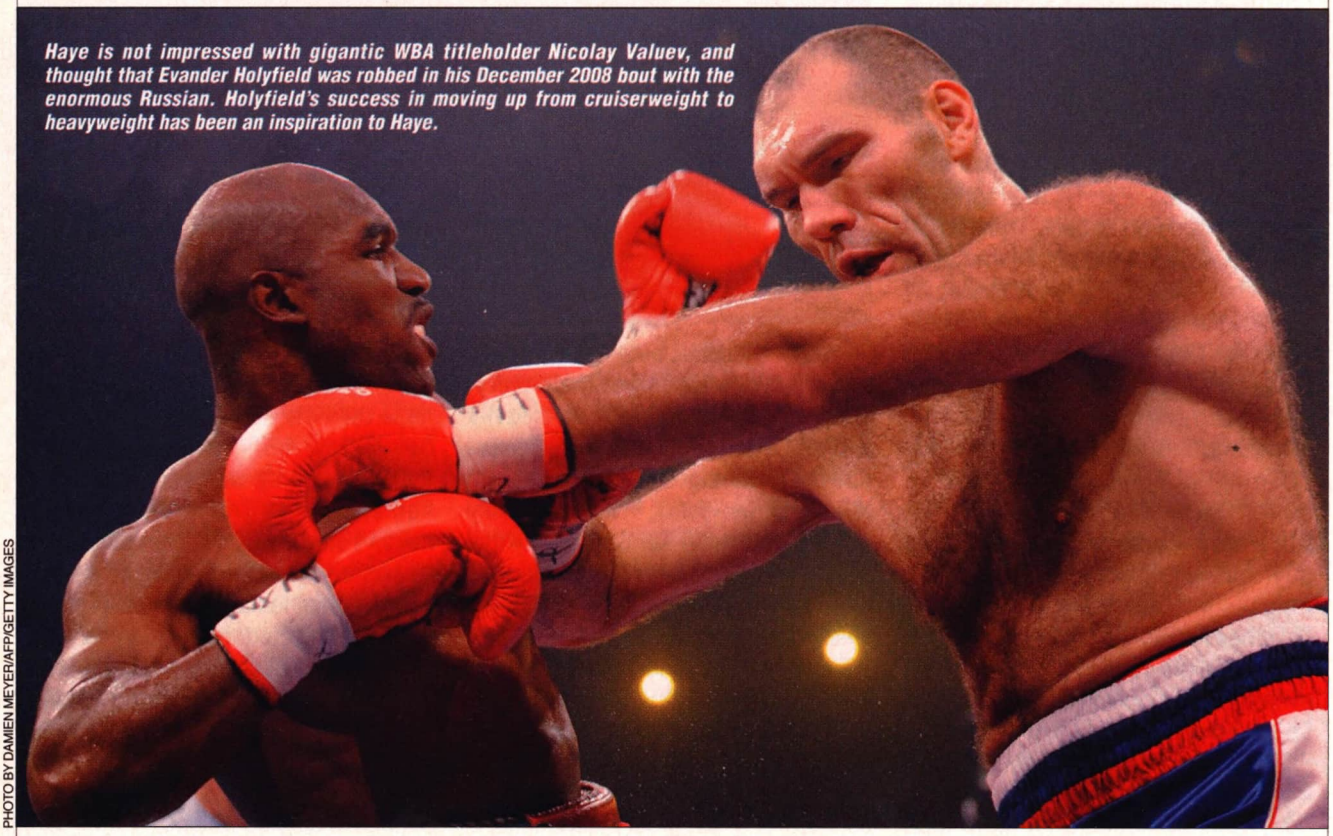
DH: Povetkin has a solid amateur background and our paths will probably cross at some stage. He is not a big heavyweight or a big puncher, but he operates successfully on a high work-rate. I recall that we both boxed at a multi-nations tournament in Croatia in 2000, the Puru Box Cup. I was on one side of the draw and he was on the other. He won his two fights on points. I won mine by first-round knockouts, and he pulled out of the final, claiming an injury. Maybe he was injured, I can't say one way or the other, but we'll get the chance to settle it one day, I'm sure.

The Ring: Currently, there is not one American heavyweight ranked in the top 10 by THE RING. Have European heavyweights improved dramatically or has there been a decline in standards, as illustrated by the demise of the American heavyweight?

DH: It's a bit of both, I think. The standard in Europe has definitely stepped up in recent years and the American guys have taken their foot off the pedal. There are possibly a lot of American athletes who could be world heavyweight champion, but they have taken a different route and they're playing in the NBA or the NFL now. They're not going into boxing because it's a tried and tested route to get ripped off and to finish up broke or with very little at the end of a long, hard career. There is a lot more money to be made in basketball and football, and boxing has not helped itself.

You hear of world champions having to go to work in a supermarket after defending their title. You rarely hear of the same thing happening to an NBA player. If you can go in one direction and end up being exploited or you can go in another and end up making a good living out of it, you would be a fool to leave yourself vulnerable.

The Ring: Is this why you have maintained your independence throughout your career before setting up your own company, Hayemaker Promotions? You were fighting in front



Haye is not impressed with gigantic WBA titleholder Nicolay Valuev, and thought that Evander Holyfield was robbed in his December 2008 bout with the enormous Russian. Holyfield's success in moving up from cruiserweight to heavyweight has been an inspiration to Haye.

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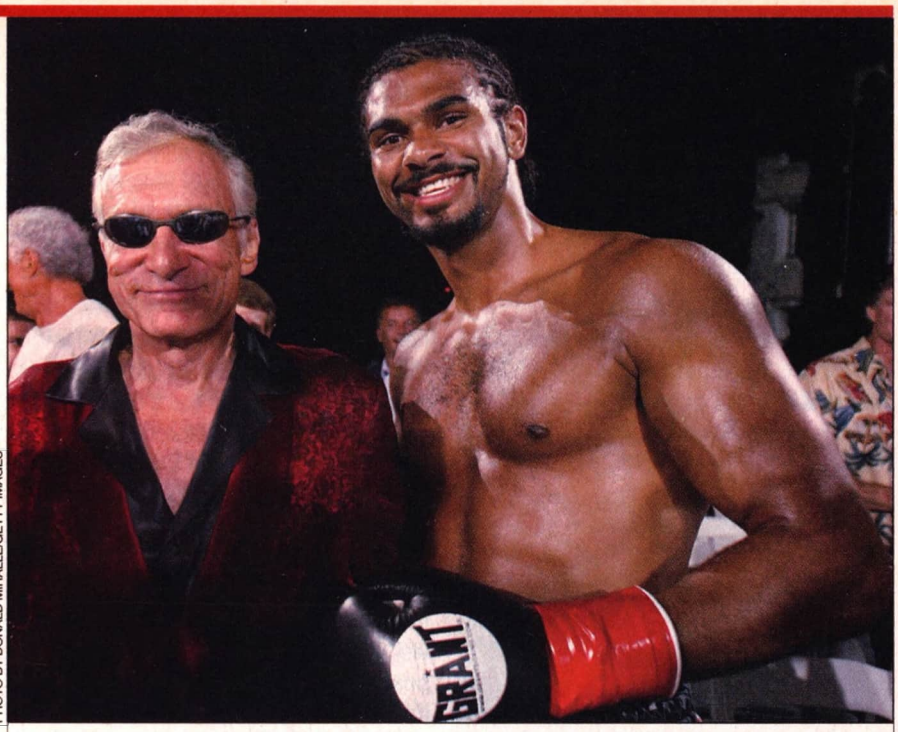

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Haye poses with Hugh Hefner in July 2003, when Haye, having only his fifth pro bout, fought at the Playboy Mansion in Bel Air, California. Despite not having fought in the U.S. since, Haye is already well known to American boxing fans, who are eager to see more of him.

of several hundred people in leisure centers around Britain until recently, yet you refused to align yourself with any one promoter.

DH: Only an elite few fighters, such as Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather, and Manny Pacquiao, get to the promised land in boxing. I would like to see many more young guys get to that point by taking their career into their own hands and earning a greater part of the pot. No boxer should have to work for a promoter. The promoter should be working for the fighter because the fighter is the proven entity and he needs to be compensated for his endeavors. We shouldn't be in the business of having to sign crazy options.

In 23 fights, I believe I have boxed for eight different promoters: Dennis Hobson, Robert Waterman, Lion Promotions, Frank Maloney, Eugene Maloney, Don King, Gary Shaw, and Sports Network. This has meant that I have never signed any long-term, restrictive deals with anyone. Everyone in the business told me that I was doing it the wrong way. "You worry about the fighting," they said. "Let someone else worry about the business." But out of all the ex-fighters I know, almost all of them have had bitter experiences. They were promised everything, but nobody delivered on it.

I have never given anyone the opportunity to take a penny off me. When I boxed Alexander Gurov for the European cruiserweight title in 2005 in front of a few hundred people at Bracknell Leisure Centre, I got my lowest-ever purse. I could have had four times the amount of money I earned, but I would have had to sign options. To be honest, I just about covered my training expenses, but I knew that the win would get me a world rating, and I knocked out Gurov in 45 seconds, so it was worth it for me. A lot of other people would not have taken the risk for the same amount of money, but I look at the bigger picture and I've always done this. I've always backed myself. My goal was to become cruiserweight champion of the world, then step up and become world heavyweight champion. The cruiserweight title was only a steppingstone.

The Ring: You have boxed in America several times as an amateur and pro. Would it be in your plans to box in the U.S. as a heavyweight?

DH: I don't have to fight in America in terms of the cold, hard economics, but I would like to do so because American boxing fans know their sport. They enjoy toe-to-toe slugfests, and I like to entertain and give the people what they want. I couldn't believe how many fans came up to me when I was at ringside in Las Vegas for the Joe Calzaghe-Bernard Hopkins fight and again for Manny Pacquiao-Oscar De La Hoya. I think they appreciate that I am the future of heavyweight boxing and that's why all the goodwill is there.

In my fifth fight, I boxed at the Playboy Mansion and Hugh Hefner sat at ringside with the bunny girls. He congratulated me as I stepped out of the ring and said, "You're a good kid with a bright future. I'll be looking out for your name." It was strange walking to the ring past the pool and seeing all those bunny girls. I almost walked right into the American football player, Keyshawn Johnson, and there were other celebrities at ringside. It was a surreal experience and, of course, I'd like to go back to America. Heavyweight boxing has been in the doldrums and it's about time it got sprinkled with some stardust again. Both America and Britain have been starved of good domestic heavyweights since the Lennox Lewis-Evander Holyfield-Riddick Bowe era, and my aim is to restore some of that luster that has been lost. I don't mean to do it in a boring way either. I'm going to do it the old-fashioned way—by knocking guys out.

The Ring: You're also attempting to accomplish something that very few fighters in history have been able to do, namely step up from a lighter weight and win the heavyweight title. What are you doing differently in terms of training and diet since you left the cruiserweight division behind?

DH: Adam Booth talks to everybody and he is constantly looking for the best training methods. Some coaches have got too much of an ego to do that, and that's what I like about him. He spoke to Mackie Shilstone, who worked with Michael Spinks, and we have incorporated some of the stuff they discussed. No one can know it all and I want to keep learning and improving and picking things up. I have a natural curiosity and I know instinctively when something feels right or wrong.

When I was a cruiserweight, for instance, I stayed away from red meat. I didn't eat any red meat, maybe occasionally, so that I could get my body weight to come down gradually. Now I eat lean steak and I would even eat steak for breakfast. I have it cooked very rare, which is a psychological thing. I think of a lion and what a lion does. He rests a lot and he goes and eats raw meat, which has all the nutrients. After you eat this, you feel ready for the day. I've decided to eat a bit more like a caveman since moving up to heavyweight. I try to eat as few vegetables as possible that need to be cooked. If you can't eat a vegetable in its raw state, you shouldn't eat it, especially if you're eating like a caveman. The amounts are probably twice or three times the size I ate when I was at cruiserweight but similar types of food, and I feel healthier in myself. I'm not depleted after training. I

PHOTO COURTESY OF SETANTA SPORTS

Hayes goes through his paces during a public workout in England, but he does most of his serious training in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

actually had to break the habit of not eating a lot. It took my body a while to get used to putting more in. I had spent so long doing that and your body gets accustomed to that. Now I'm starting to eat properly. To go back to what I was doing as a cruiserweight would be impossible now. I don't know how I did it.

The Ring: Do you also lift weights?

DH: I've always done weights, even as a cruiserweight. People think that weights make you bulky, but there are certain weight-training programs that can help you lose weight by burning fat. Some people don't understand this. I'm not doing anything to build muscle bulk and I'm no bulkier muscle-wise. This is my natural weight and I'm just as lean as I was as a cruiserweight. I've been putting on lean muscle and losing body fat.

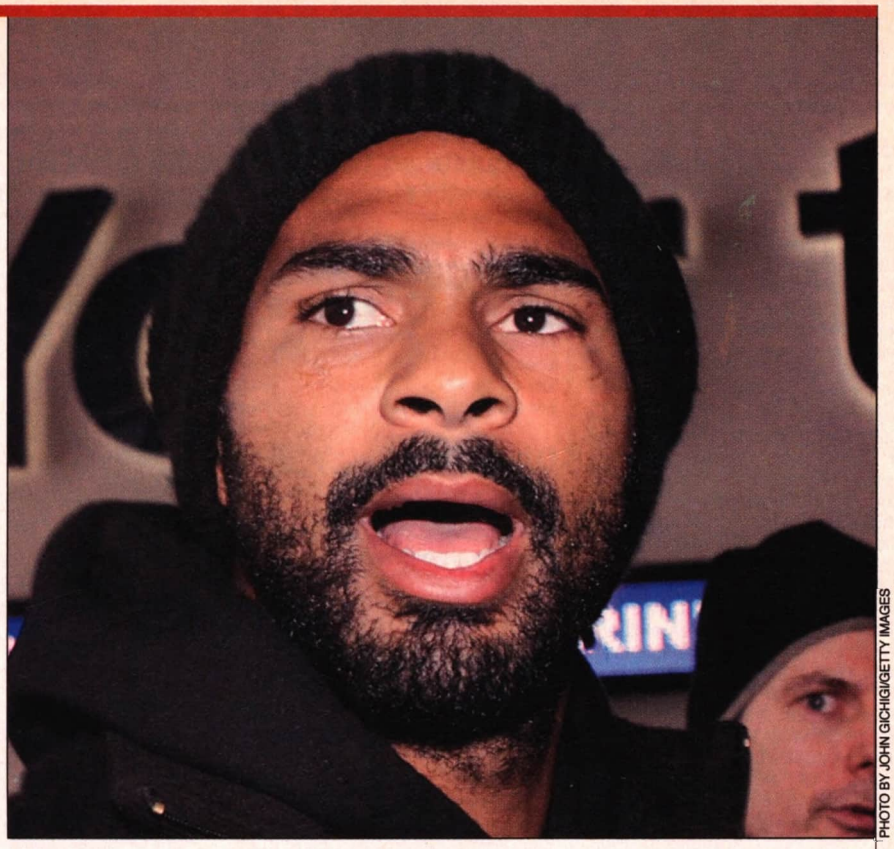
If you bought all of the heavyweights in the world down to 10-percent body fat, I would be surprised if any one of them weighed much more than 15 stone (210 pounds). They just carry around a whole load of fat, and it's laziness. They like the fast-food lifestyle, particularly in America. Chris Byrd ate junk food to build himself up from middleweight to heavyweight as a pro, and he was good enough to win the IBF title. But he got knocked out when he moved down to light heavyweight. That shows how bad the heavyweight division is. He was so used to fighting big, slow guys, and he thought that a little guy would not be able to hurt him. He didn't realize that speed makes a difference and he got absolutely starched. We will see what a little bit of speed does in the heavyweight division.

The Ring: Early in your professional career you had a reputation as a bit of a playboy. You have modeled for Versace and Abercrombie & Fitch, and for a time you lived that kind of life. You have settled down now with your wife, Natasha, and your young son, Cassius, and you live mostly in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, where you also train for your fights. How much has this influenced your change in lifestyle and how beneficial has this been?

DH: With fatherhood comes a greater sense of responsibility and, obviously, my family means the world to me. I couldn't have a better setup than I do right now in terms of my family life and the base that I have in Northern Cyprus. It was Adam who suggested to me to come here, and I have trained here for my fights with Jean-Marc Mormeck, the Enzo Maccarinelli fight, and the Barrett bout as well. I live on the beach and in the gym, which I have built, is five minutes from my home. It's ideal, the perfect environment for a fighter. This the lifestyle that I lead now and I could not be happier here.

The Ring: Lennox Lewis provided some further encouragement recently when he told you that he believes you would knock out Wladimir Klitschko. Is it true that you may invite him to your camp in an advisory role?

DH: I am really good friends with Lennox, and he was not impressed at all when Wladimir fought Rahman. Lennox would have knocked out that version of Rahman in two rounds, and I believe that I would have done the same. When I was in Miami, I worked with Lennox in training camp and he knows the Kltischko brothers as well as anybody. Wladimir was being lined up to fight him before he retired and he beat Vitali when he wasn't even at his best. When I get my opportunity, I will inflict the same kind of pain. The Klitschkos know this, but they know also that they will have to step up to the plate. There is no excuse for fighting also-rans when they can fight the real deal. ■



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"The best way to learn, I have always believed, is to throw yourself in at the deep end. Heavyweights will think I'm a small guy, but when they see me at the weigh-in, they are going to realize that I'm a heavyweight."

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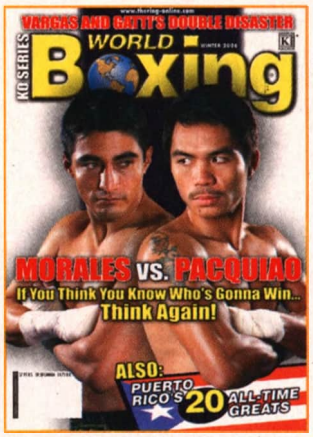

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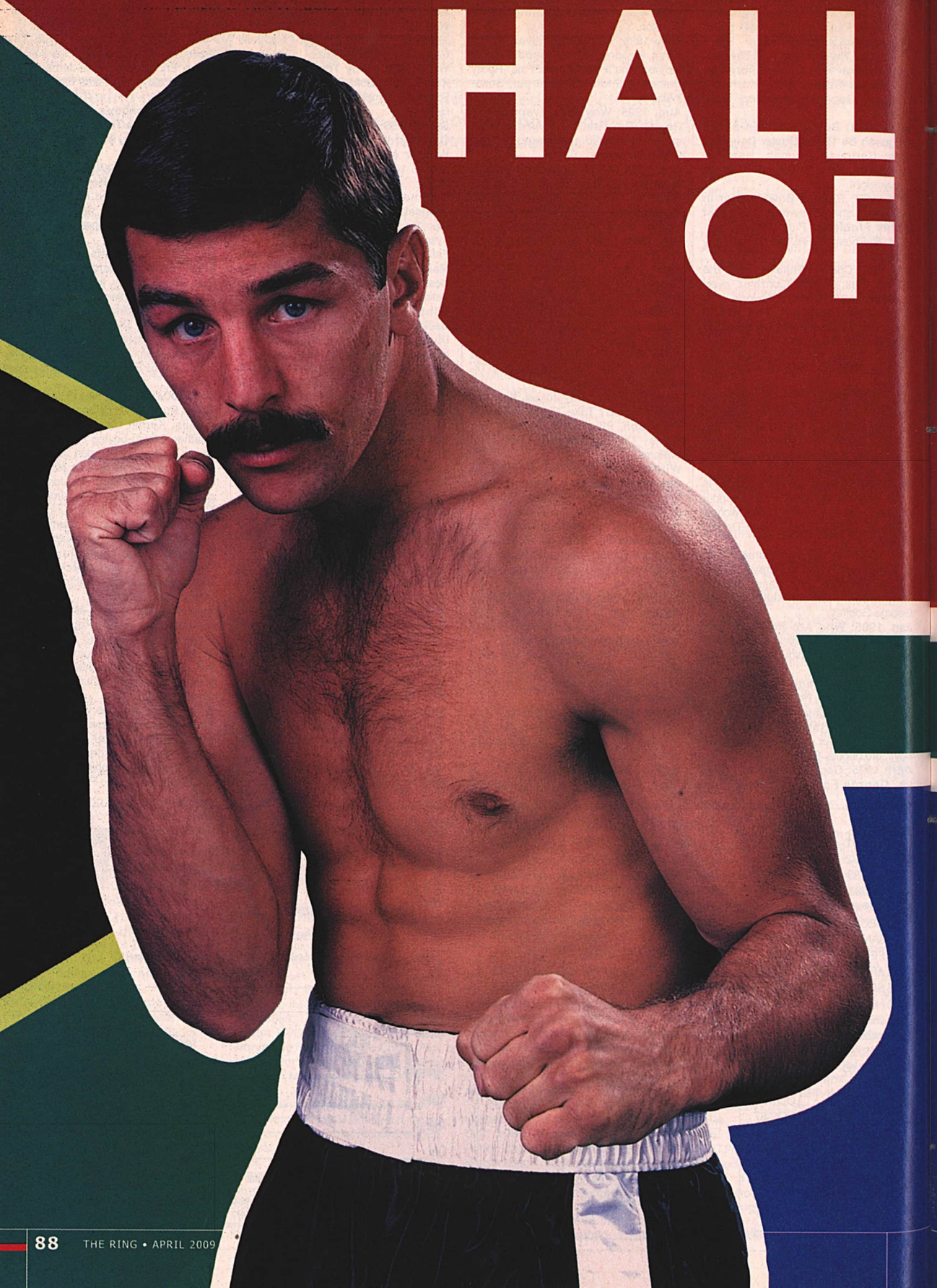


HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BRIAN MITCHELL

A White Victim Of Apartheid

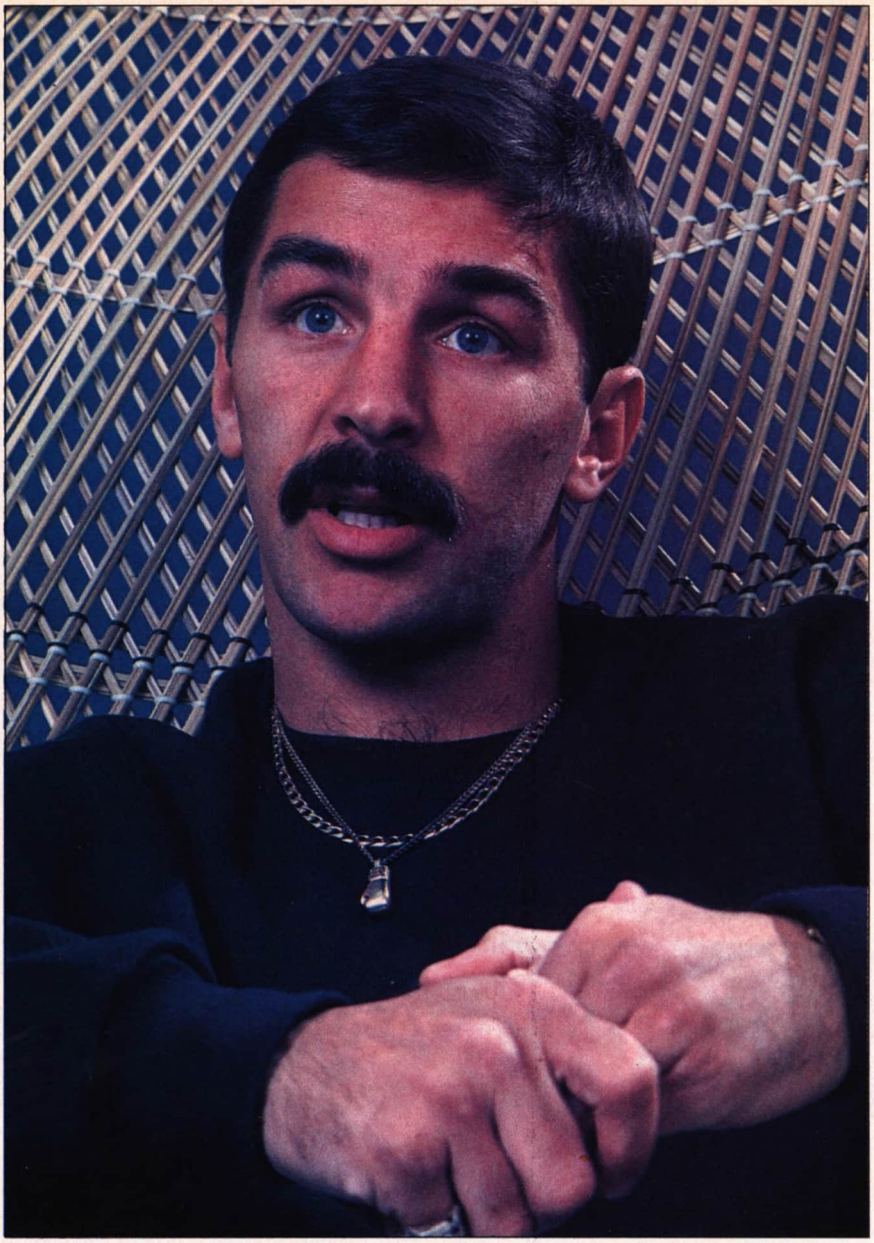
By Gavin Evans

Brian Mitchell, who will be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in June, may have grown up with the putative privilege of being a white lad in apartheid South Africa, but it never felt that way: He was always up against it.

The obstacles he overcame to become South Africa's greatest-ever boxer would have broken most men, but Mitchell had one great asset that saw him through: his bloody-minded, bit-chomping drive to succeed where his own father had failed. And he pulled it off in a way that exceeded everyone's expectations, even his own—five continual years as WBA and IBF super featherweight titleholder, 14 title bouts without defeat (13 abroad), and just one points loss in 49 bouts (thrice avenged).

Mitchell's fraught upbringing was about as hard as it got for white lads in Johannesburg. His brawling, bad boy dad, the first Brian Mitchell, was a South African flyweight champion who fell into alcoholism, so his mother, Cecelia, raised Brian Junior in poverty.

"Jesus, I mean we were poor—like really poor," he once said. "We didn't have much furniture and my mother struggled to put food on the table."



Mitchell spoke out against apartheid, but insisted he was a sportsman, not a politician. Even so, he also urged his fellow South Africans to vote yes in a referendum held among white voters on the question of whether to negotiate with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress.

Mitchell's abiding memory of those years is of deprivation, being worse off than his cousins and classmates. He left school at 16 and completed an apprenticeship as a tool-and-dye maker, before being conscripted for two years of compulsory military service, after which he worked as an artisan.

Along the way he did reasonably well in amateur boxing and developed a formidable reputation outside the ring. He survived one stabbing, but invariably came out on top.

"I had that background, and I enjoyed the streetfighting when I was younger," he said.

Shortly before his 20th birthday he turned professional, mainly as a way of topping up his wages. This 5'6", short-armed, slope-shouldered, bigheaded lad quickly developed a reputation as a give-no-quarter hard case, who, unlike many other white boxers, had no qualms about plying his trade in the black townships.

Trained by former world title contender Willie Toweel, he won his first six fights before running into the slick, quick provincial champion, Jacob Morake, who was six years older and having his 24th fight. Morake, the hometown favorite, got the nod. Soon after, Mitchell was held to a draw by the unbeaten Frank Khonkhobe, again in his opponent's backyard.

It was after this setback that he showed his fortitude, changing his lifestyle to fulfill his ambitions.

"I'd been through a stage when I was drinking with friends and going to those bad little places where guys look for fights, and I was looking for fights too," he recalled.

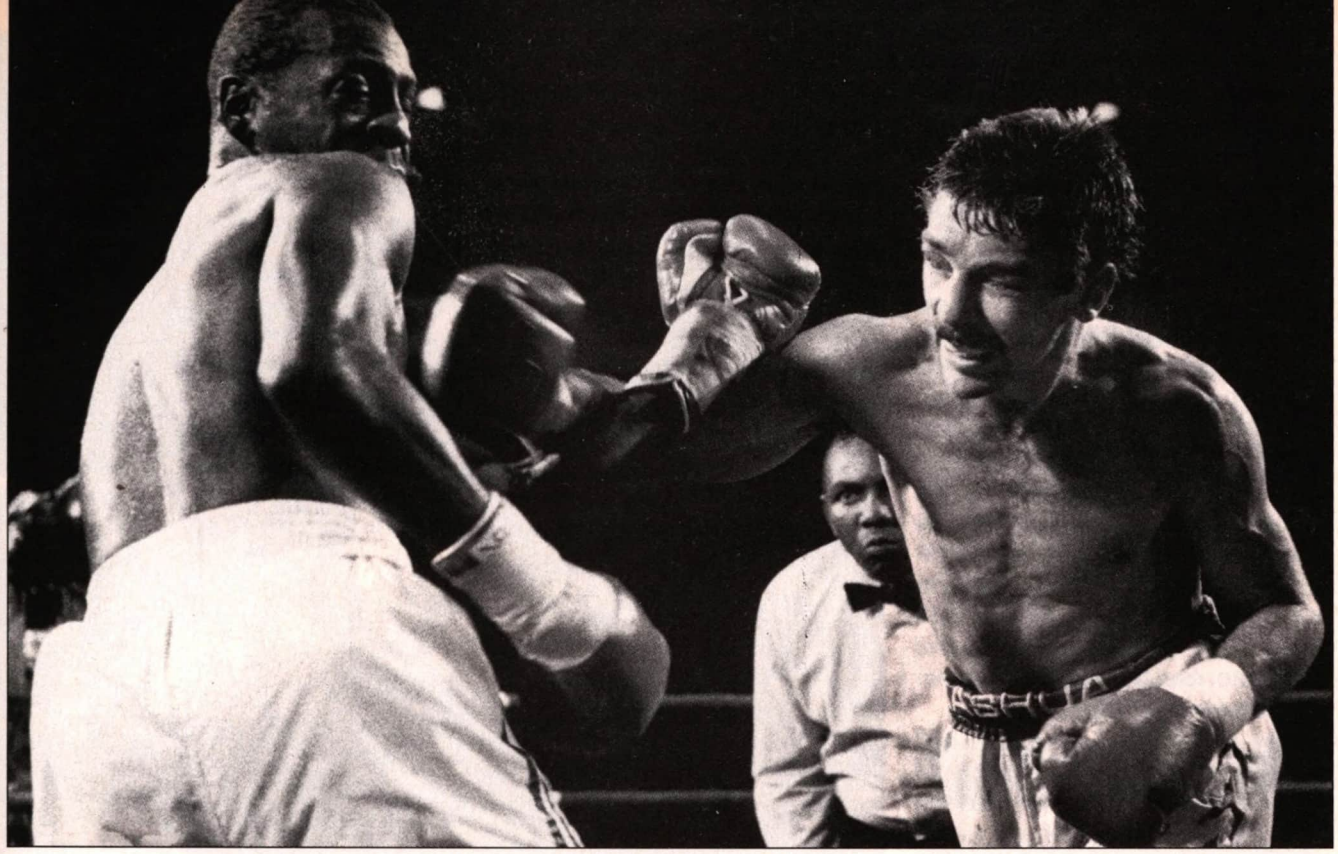
Remembering his father's troubles, he stopped drinking, stayed away from nightclubs, married his 17-year-old sweetheart, Kathy, and dedicated himself to a regime that established his reputation as the fittest boxer in the country.

He beat Morake and Khonkhobe a couple of times each, won the South African title, and continued to improve. He was more fighter than boxer: busy, relentless, aggressive. But as he progressed he became increasingly defensive, partly because his tendency to cut meant he needed to take as few punches as possible.

South Africa's cosy connections with the WBA hierarchy secured Mitchell a top-10 rating in 1985, and even though he had never faced anyone world ranked, he was clearly world class.

In November that year, the golden boy of South African boxing, junior welterweight Brian Baronet, was supposed to fight for the WBA title, but international political pressure scuppered this option, and instead he accepted a Sun City fight against black hero Arthur Mayisela, who dished out a terrible beating (Baronet died two years later from the effects of the light punches of American Kenny Vice).

Heading the undercard was Mitchell, and the promoters once again drafted in Morake, who'd been out of action for 15 months. This time it was utterly one-sided, yet the referee, Col. Wally Snowball,



Forced to defend the WBA 130-pound title outside of his native South Africa due to the political situation at home, Mitchell fought all 13 defenses on the road, including a seventh-round kayo of Irving Mitchell in Lewiston, Maine (pictured).

hovered without intervening. Morake was dropped heavily in round 11 and told his corner he couldn't continue. They sent him out for the final round anyway, and Mitchell dropped him again with a volley of heavy headshots. Morake hauled himself up at nine and, astonishingly, was allowed to continue. Three heavy blows landed and he fell as if shot, his head banging against the ring floor. He left the ring on a stretcher and died later that night.

Mitchell felt sad, but he was a practical man, not given to introspection, and never blamed himself.

"There's always a possibility you take too many punches and overstay your welcome," he said then, "but I believe if God gives you an ability, you must make the most of it. If you're born a great sportsman, like me, you must use it."

Two wins later he became the final South African to challenge for a WBA title during the apartheid era. He faced Panamanian Alfredo Layne, who had skimped on training and struggled to make weight. Layne edged a couple of the early rounds and cut Mitchell, but faded in the high altitude of Sun City. Mitchell used a ferocious body attack to take control, dropping Layne three times to force the stoppage in the 10th round.

He describes this victory as the most thrilling of his career. "I was the underdog because he'd just stopped Wilfredo Gomez, so stopping him to win the WBA title in front of my own fans and family was wonderful. I didn't know it at the time, but that was to be my only title fight at home."

Soon after, the WBA bosses reluctantly fell in line with the WBC by blacklisting South African boxers. But Mitchell was already their beltholder, so the compromise was that from then on he would have to make all his defenses abroad.

When faced with the foreign press, Mitchell sometimes seemed naïve about the political complexities of his position, but when pushed, he was willing to speak his mind.

"I have openly come out against apartheid, but I'm not here to represent South Africa. I'm a sportsman and not a politician," he said. In 1990 he went further. A referendum was held among white voters on the question of whether to negotiate with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. Mitchell made a stand, urging his countrymen to vote "yes."

In his maiden defense, the 25-year-old traveled to Puerto Rico and seemed unfortunate to come away with only a draw against Joe Rivera. A year later they fought again in Spain and this time, as always in rematches, Mitchell dominated.

Other defenses took place in Panama, France, Italy, Britain, and the United States. One of his victims was previously unbeaten European champion Jim McDonnell (who, two fights later, would end the

career of Barry McGuigan). Mitchell took him to school, winning 10 of the 12 rounds.

"He does nothing brilliantly but everything very well," said McDonnell, "and when you put those things together, the effect is one of brilliance."

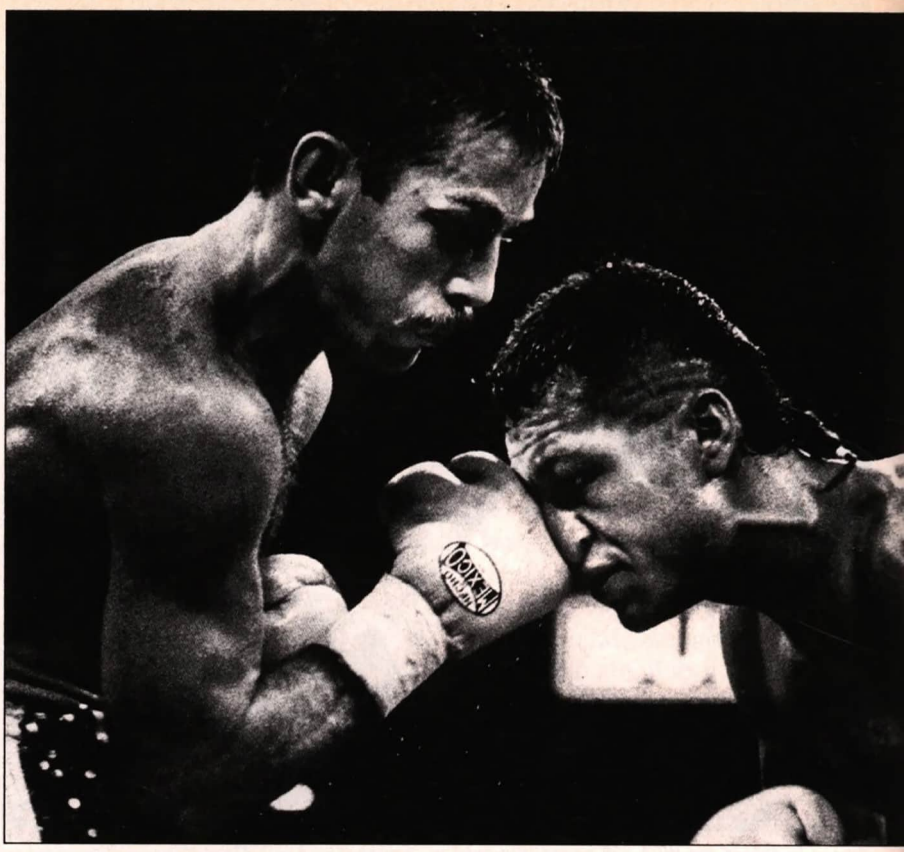
In 1988 Mitchell took on a new trainer, American Murphy Griffiths. "I only realized how professional I could be when I joined Murphy," he said. "At such a late stage in my career he started teaching me the basics of jabbing again. When you get to San Diego and the guy puts your one hand behind your back and works on your jab for two weeks, you think, *Jeez, what's this? I'm a world champion*, and then you realize that you never stop learning in this game."

The fighter who emerged still looked the same—fighting out of a crouch with a look of intense concentration—but there were fresh touches: a more solid and persistent jab, an added talent for slipping and ducking, greater precision to his punches. Everything flowed beautifully and there were seldom mistakes.

Some of Mitchell's defenses were against second-raters, but others featured world-class competition, including McDonnell, Jackie Beard, Frankie Mitchell, and Tony Lopez. He rated his 1989 defense against unbeaten Philadelphian Mitchell as the toughest of his career, an intense, tactical battle until the South African took over down the stretch, winning a unanimous decision.

After this, Mitchell began to think about retirement, but his promoter, Rodney Berman, secured an agreement for a unification bout with IBF titlist Lopez, in Sacramento, California, in March 1991.

Mitchell had always wanted to unify the title, and it was one of the regrets of his career that he was banned from facing WBC titlist Azumah Nelson because of the sporting boycott. The cagey and big-hitting Nelson would have been



Mitchell twice fought hometown hero Tony "The Tiger" Lopez in Sacramento, California. The first fight ended in a draw, but Mitchell won a unanimous 12-round decision in the September 1991 rematch.

the favorite, but the quicker, busier Mitchell would certainly have had a chance of securing an upset.

Lopez, on his second reign as IBF titlist, was fresh from an impressive victory over Jorge Paez and a strong favorite. Mitchell made a slow start, but took over by the halfway mark and most ringsiders agreed with judge Dave Moretti that he was two points ahead by the final bell. The official verdict, however, was a draw, which meant a return trip to Sacramento.

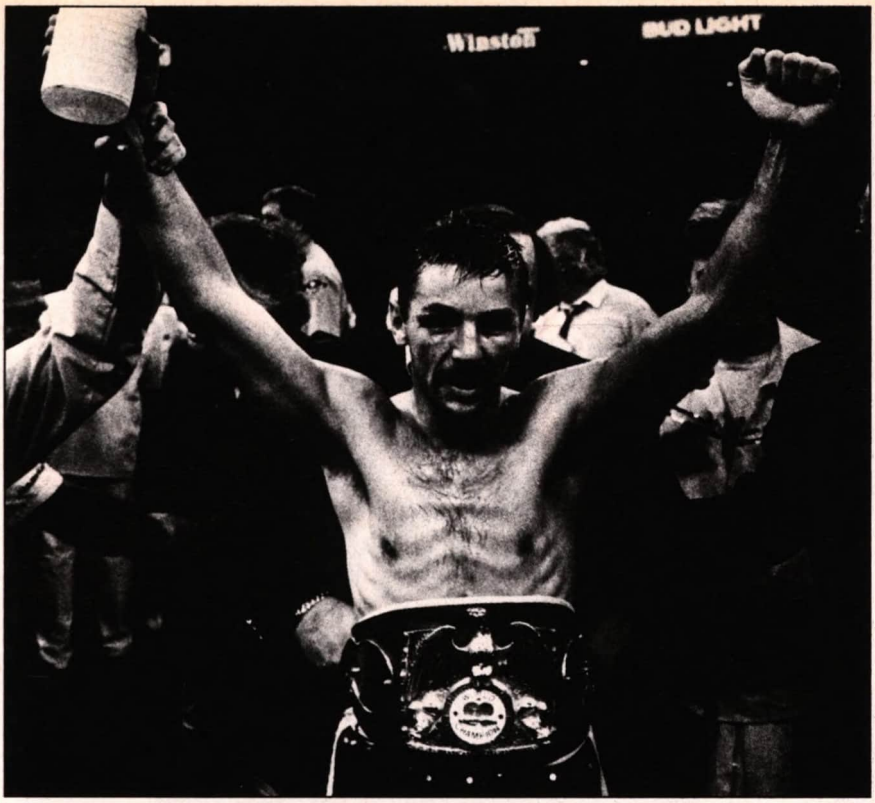
The second time, Lopez came in half a pound over the limit, but the Mitchell camp agreed to look the other way rather than risk a cancellation. The South African dominated from the first bell, outjabbing the Californian, defusing his rushes, countering his lunges, moving in and out, always within range but seldom in one spot for long enough to take any punishment. After 12 rounds he had silenced the home crowd and persuaded all three judges that he was the victor, with plenty to spare.

"Beating Lopez in his hometown was the cherry on the cake of my career," Mitchell said.

Weight troubles, those five years on the road, and his sense that he had achieved his goals, prompted Mitchell's retirement a few months later at the age of 30. He got into motivational speaking and the property business, put on weight and, by his own admission, "overdid it on the beer front."

Three years later he announced a comeback and picked up a couple of victories over decent opposition at junior welterweight. But after his second comeback win, against Silverio Flores, he retired again.

"Every part of me felt sore, and I said to Kathy, 'I don't need this anymore.' I didn't want to put my body through hell again. I'd gone out on a win, I'd had a brilliant career, and I was nearly 34. I couldn't complain.' His record stood at 45-1-3 (21).



Mitchell, the long-reigning WBA titleholder, won the IBF belt in his second fight with Lopez, which Mitchell considered the "cherry on top" of his Hall of Fame career.

Mitchell went into boxing management and training, and proved to be an excellent teacher, with his charges including current IBF super featherweight titlist Cassius Baloyi, and, to everyone's surprise, his erratically brilliant former rival, Dingaan Thobela.

In his junior lightweight days, the popular "Rose Of Soweto" had constantly campaigned for a showdown, but Berman had refused, saying it wasn't in his man's financial interests. Years later, Berman admitted it would have been a huge money-maker, but that he'd been worried Thobela would "cut Brian to ribbons with his combinations." The other possibility, of course, was that the fitter, more technically proficient, and busier Mitchell would have outworked Thobela.

For several years there was a caustic rivalry between the pair, which caused Mitchell's reputation temporary damage at home. But with retirement, his sense of humour emerged along with a less combative, more relaxed, gentler countenance. The animosity with Thobela evaporated, and the pair got on well.

Mitchell eventually grew tired of the backbiting and politics of professional boxing and concentrated more on his expanding property interests, while occasionally branching out into new territories, including a three-month spell in pantomime.

Today, at 47, married for the second time and a father of four, he seems content with his lot. After a break of several years, he has returned to boxing, mixing his business concerns with regular gigs as a M-Net television boxing commentator.

When he heard he'd been elected to the International Hall of Fame, he was ecstatic. "It is such a huge honor to be the first South African boxer to be included in the company of heroes of mine like Joe Louis. Absolutely awesome!" ■

Gavin Evans is a freelancer writer based in London and a regular contributor to THE RING.

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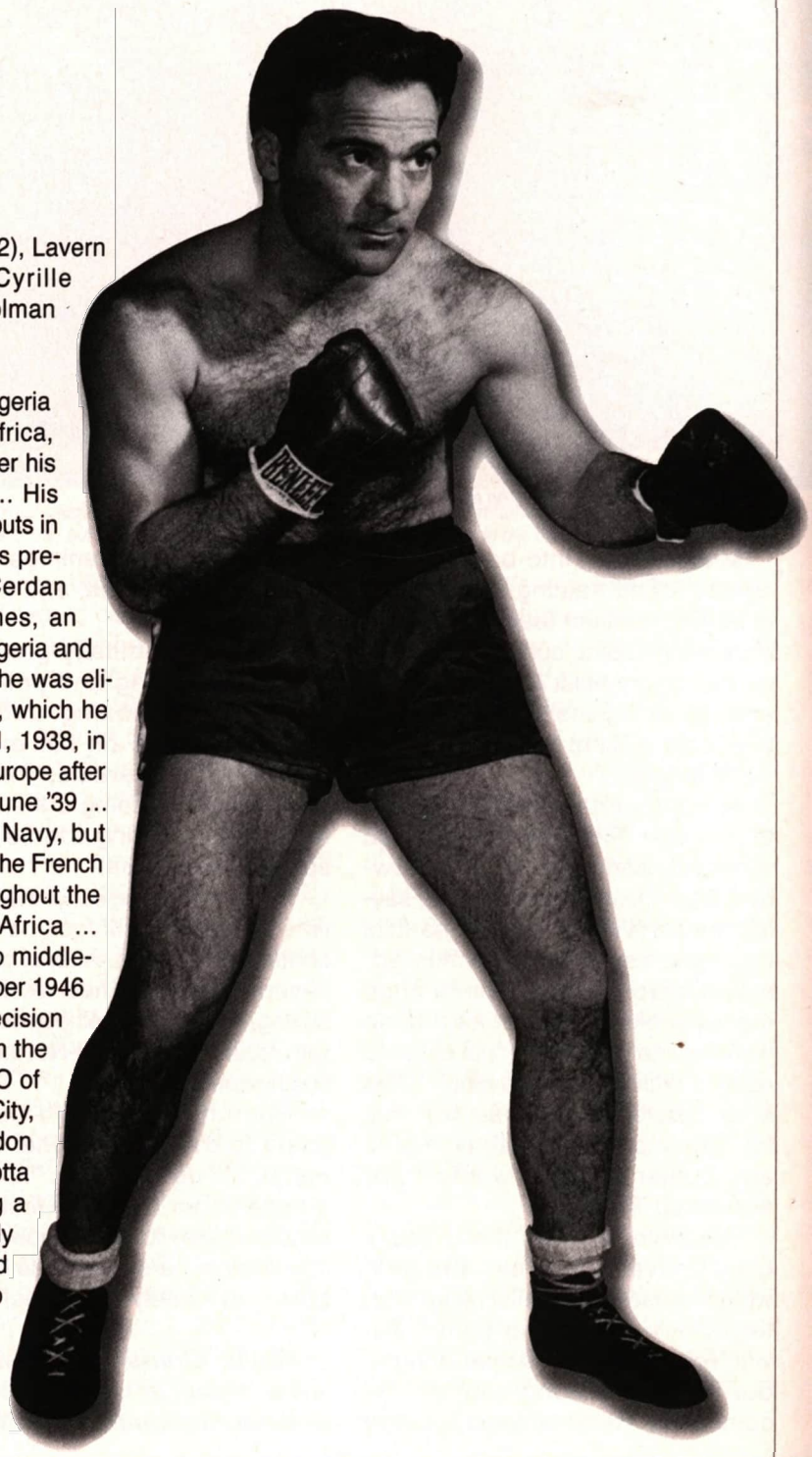
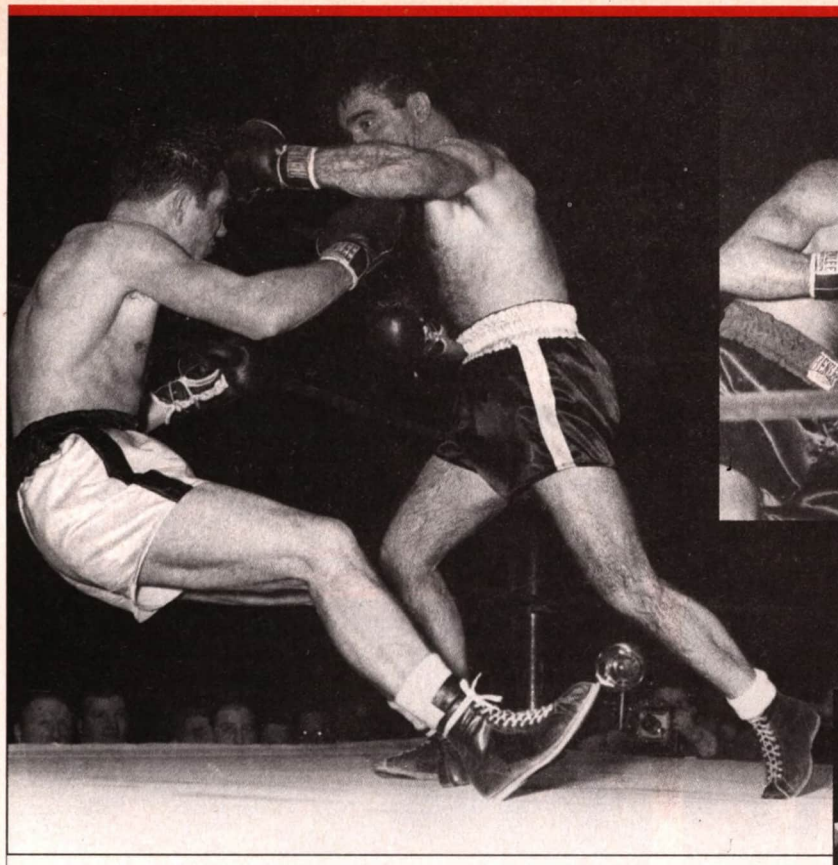
[Hall of Fame Profile]

THE RING features a thumbnail biography of a ring great who has received the ultimate honor: induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York

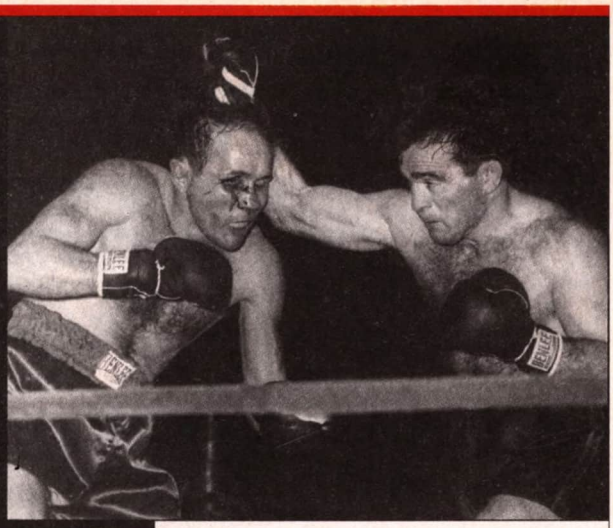
Marcel Cerdan

Birthdate: July 22, 1916
Birthplace: Sidi Bel-Abbes, Algeria
Date of Death: October 27, 1949
Nickname: The Casablanca Clouter
Weight Class: Middleweight
Professional Record: 105-4 (60)
Title: World Middleweight (September 21, 1948-June 16, 1949)
Best Performances: Tony Zale (KO 12), Lavern Roach (KO 8), Harold Green (KO 2), Cyrille Delannoit (W 15), Jean Walzack (KO 4), Holman Williams (W 10)
Year of IBHOF Induction: 1991
Background: Although he was born in Algeria and had more than 50 pro bouts in North Africa, Cerdan is still considered, almost 60 years after his death, France's greatest fighter of all-time ... His father was a butcher who promoted amateur bouts in Casablanca, Morocco, and two of his brothers preceded him into the professional ranks ... Cerdan turned pro on November 4, 1934, in Meknes, an ancient city in northwestern Morocco, and as Algeria and parts of Morocco were then French colonies, he was eligible to fight for the French welterweight title, which he won by beating Omar Kouridri on February 21, 1938, in Casablanca ... Began to fight increasingly in Europe after that and won the Euro welter title in Milan in June '39 ... Inactive in 1940 while serving in the French Navy, but when the occupying German forces disbanded the French Navy, he returned to the ring and fought throughout the World War II in both in France and North Africa ... Following the end of the war, he moved up to middleweight before making his U.S. debut in December 1946 with an unpopular but unanimous 10-round decision over Georgie Abrams in New York City ... Won the world middleweight title with a 12th-round TKO of Tony Zale on September 21, 1948, in Jersey City, New Jersey ... Following non-title wins in London and Casablanca, he lost the title to Jake LaMotta on June 16, 1949, in Detroit, after suffering a shoulder injury in the first round that eventually led to a capitulation at the end of the 10th round ... Died in an airplane crash on his way back to the United States for a rematch with LaMotta ... His son, Marcel Cerdan Jr., fought professionally from 1964 to '72, but never had anywhere near the success of his father.

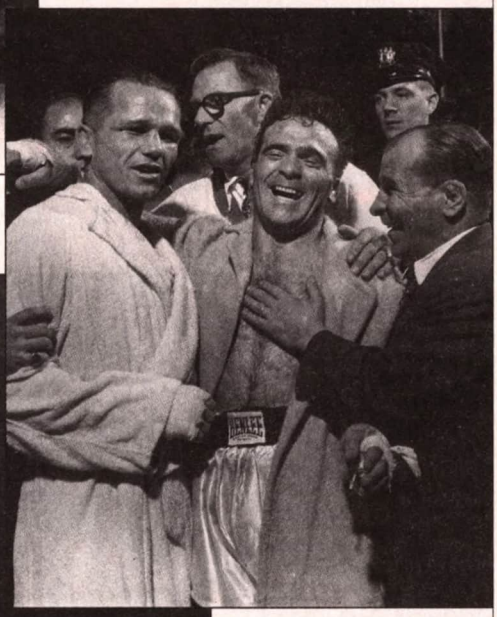




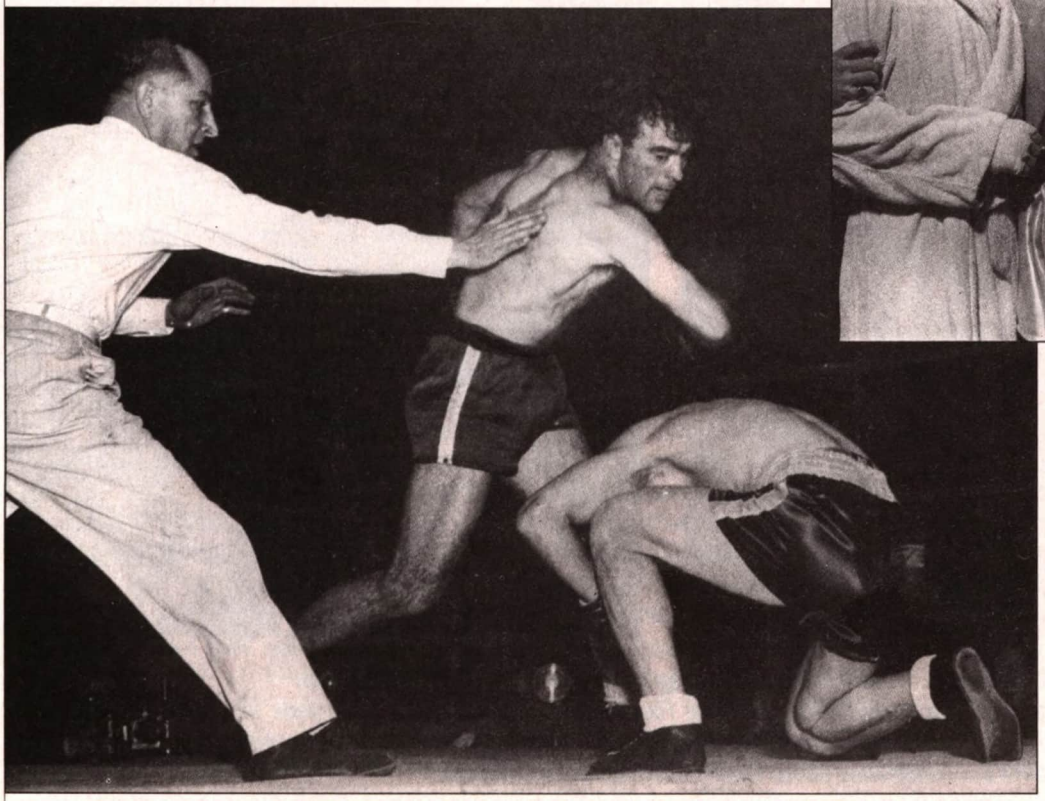
Cerdan knocks down Lavern Roach with a left hook in the eighth round of their March 1948 fight at Madison Square Garden. Referee Arthur Donovan stopped the fight later in the round, awarding Cerdan a TKO victory.



It looks like the blood-splattered Georgie Abrams was in serious trouble as Cerdan attacks during the Frenchman's U.S. debut. But the despite the unanimous decision in Cerdan's favor, fans at Madison Square Garden bitterly protested the decision.



Deposed champion Tony Zale congratulates his happy conqueror after losing the middleweight championship via 12th-round TKO. It was Zale's final fight. Cerdan went 2-1 in his next three bouts before his untimely death at the age of 33.



Cerdan bowls over Jean Walzack for a fourth-round knockout in defense of the European middleweight title. The bout took place at the Palais des Sports in Paris on February 11, 1948.

Junior Welterweight Alphabet Unification

Timothy Bradley

Main Event 12 Rounds

Kendall Holt

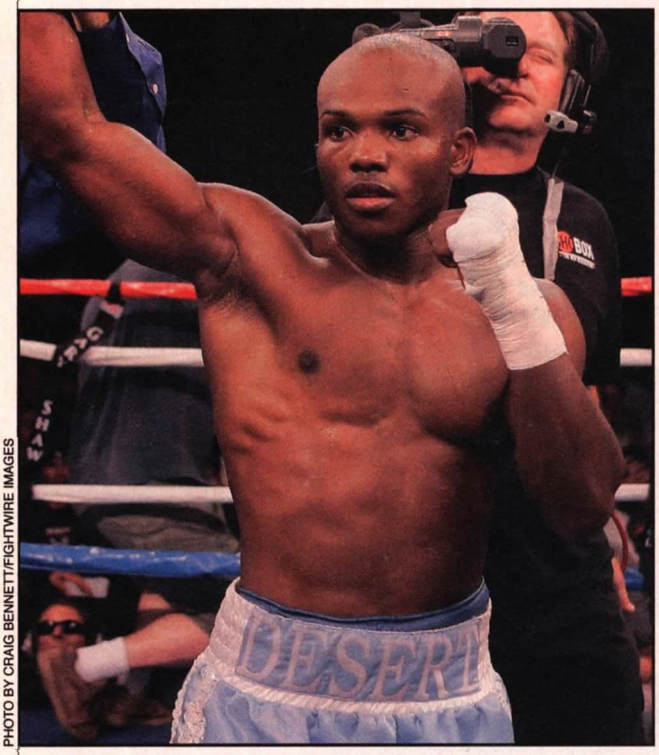


PHOTO BY CRAIG BENNETT/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

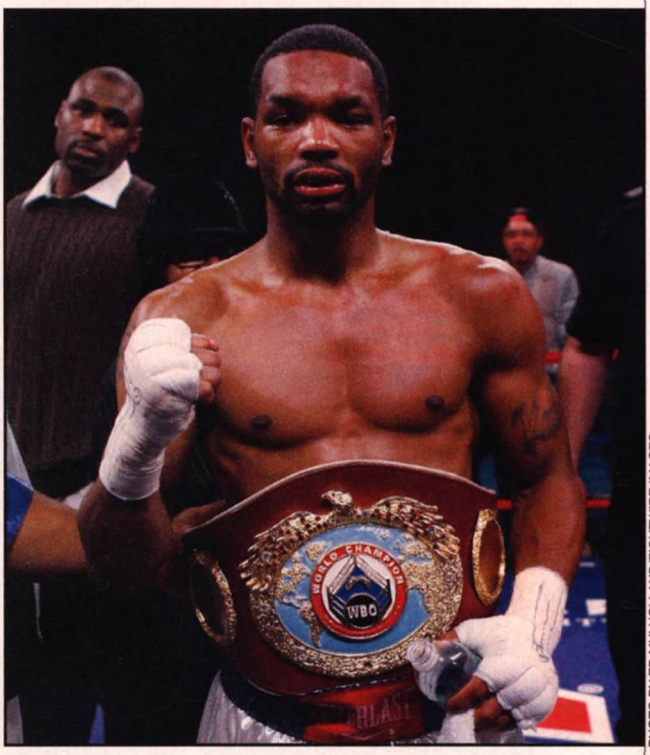


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

While the three-way waltz between Manny Pacquiao, Floyd Mayweather, and THE RING's junior welterweight world champ Ricky Hatton plays itself out, there are other potential stars in the 140-pound vicinity jockeying for inclusion in the pound-for-pound discussion. Two of them will meet April 4 on Showtime.

The winner of the Timothy Bradley-Kendall Holt junior welterweight clash will not only strengthen his position for a crack at one of the aforementioned cash cows, but will build some serious credibility in his own right. Both Bradley and Holt are talented fighters and a meeting between the two could go in various directions.

Holt, THE RING's sixth-rated junior welterweight, is coming off a productive 2008. "R-Rated" got up from two knockdowns and, with the help of an accidental headbutt, scored a 61-second stoppage of rival Ricardo Torres. Five months later, the Paterson, New Jersey, native showed his versatility in outboxing Demetrius Hopkins over 12 rounds.

Bradley, meanwhile, vaulted from prospect status to THE RING's top-rated junior welter last year. In May, "Desert Storm" pulled a major upset when he went to England and took a 12-round split-decision from Junior Witter, winning the WBC belt. The Palm Spring, California, native then outpointed Edner Cherry in a September defense.

The cherry on top of the sundae for the Bradley-Holt winner could be a crack at Hatton, Pacquiao, or even Mayweather down the line. At the very least, the victor will greatly strengthen his position in the 140-pound ranks.

Timothy Bradley

Kendall Holt

Record and World Rating

Bradley floors Cherry

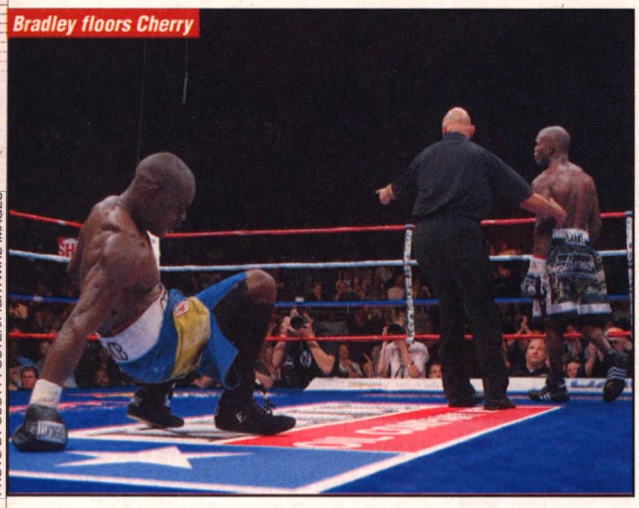


PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Is 23-0 with 11 knockouts ... Had over 140 amateur bouts. Won two national tournaments at 147 pounds. Was forced to fight at 152 after 147-pound class was dissolved ... Made pro debut in August '04 ... First 21 bouts were in California ... Won WBC junior welterweight belt in May '08 ... Made one successful defense ... Rated number one at junior welterweight by THE RING.

Holt punishes Hopkins

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Is 25-2 with 13 knockouts ... Captured three New Jersey Golden Gloves titles as amateur ... Made pro debut in March '01 ... Won first 15 fights, including 11 by knockout ... Failed to win WBO junior welterweight belt in September '07 ... Won WBO junior welterweight belt in July '08 ... Made one successful defense ... Is rated number six at junior welterweight by THE RING.

Age and Physical Equipment

Bradley stuns Witter with a right to the chin

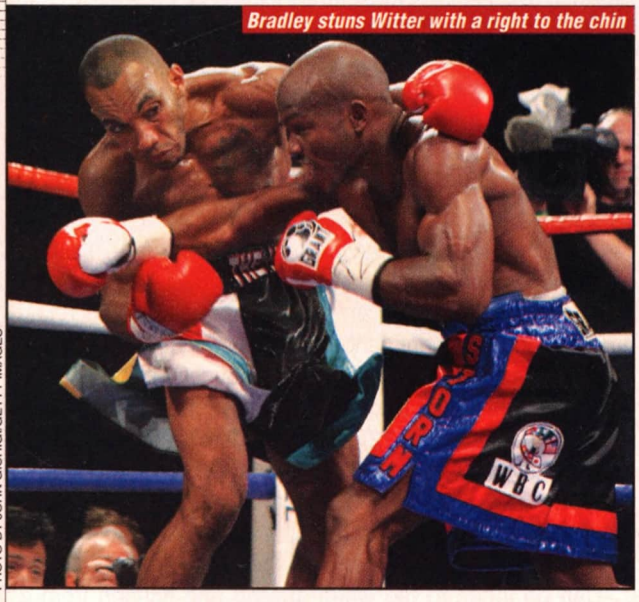


PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Is 25 years old ... Stands 5'6" with 69-inch reach ... Short in stature, but blessed with ripped muscular physique ... Very athletic ... Uses excellent hand and foot speed to overcome height deficiencies ... Sturdy chin ... Trains in desert outside Palm Springs, and is always in great shape ... Swells but doesn't cut.

Holt tears into Trigg

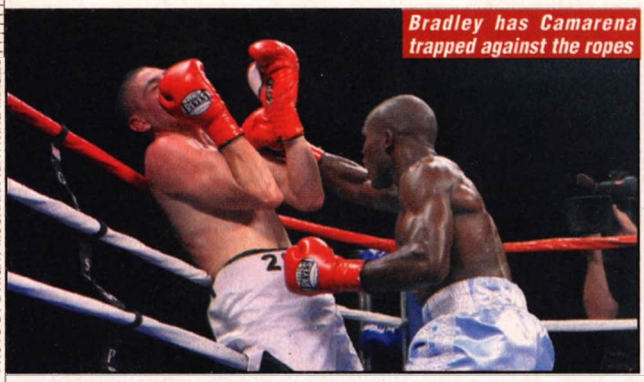
PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Is 27 years old ... Stands 5'9" with 74-inch reach ... Seems to be at or nearing his physical peak ... Tall, slender build ... Above-average height and reach for junior welterweight ... Superb hand and foot speed ... Sharp reflexes ... Highly questionable chin ... Normally thick skin, but susceptible to occasional cut.

Timothy Bradley

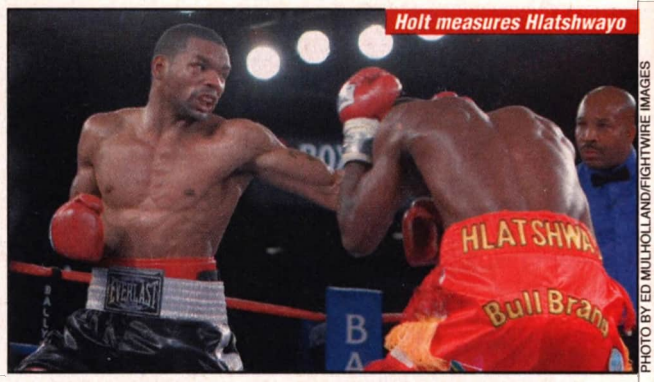
Kendall Holt

Best Weapons



Bradley has Camarena trapped against the ropes

PHOTO BY DWIGHT MCCANN/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES



Holt measures Hlatshwayo

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Has a sharp jab that sets up everything ... Strong right hand that can cause damage, but mostly overwhelms opponents with speed and volume punching ... Mobility makes him tough to hit cleanly. Take a shot well when tagged ... Smart, disciplined fighter who can adjust along the way.

Possesses two-fisted power that is better than his knockout record indicates ... Uses experience and ring savvy to set up crushing counters ... Jab and movement are good enough to control a fight ... Admirable resiliency. Has bounced back from setbacks in and out of the ring, and rallied from knockdowns.

Previous Fight

Cruised to 12-round unanimous decision against fringe contender Edner Cherry ... Fight was bumped up to Showtime-televised main event after Joan Guzman failed to make weight for Nate Campbell fight ... Used speed and bodyattack to wear Cherry down early ... From fifth round on, dominated from a distance with jab ... Scored flash knockdown in eighth with right hook over lazy jab ... Remained aggressive throughout ... Prevailed by scores of 119-109, 118-109, and 117-110.

Captured 12-round split decision against late-sub Demetrius Hopkins at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall ... Had been scheduled for rubber match with Ricardo Torres, who pulled out six days beforehand ... Much of fight involved Hopkins playing keep away, and Holt trying to cut off ring ... Hopkins was nearly dropped when he tried to engage Holt in seventh ... Won by scores of 117-111 and 116-112. One judge had it 115-113 for Hopkins. THE RING scored it 117-111 for Holt.

Quality of Opposition

Took major step up in class last May with upset of Junior Witter (W 12) in England. It was Bradley's first fight outside California. Witter was ranked number two at junior welterweight by THE RING at the time ... Developed against trialhorse Artura Urena (KO 3), former contender Alfonso Sanchez (KO 1), and fringe contender Manuel Garnica (W 8) ... Had scheduled fight with former lightweight champ Jose Luis Castillo fall through in March 2008 when Castillo couldn't make weight.

Has been fighting world-class opposition for four years ... Was beating Ricardo Torres in Colombia before Torres rallied to score controversial 11th-round stoppage ... Got up from two knockdowns to stop Torres in first round of rematch last July ... Caught by right hand and stopped in first by journeyman Thomas Davis in June 2004 ... Bounced back by stunning unbeaten David Diaz (KO 8) ... Went on to beat trialhorse Jamie Rangel (W 12) and contenders Isaac Hlatshwayo (W 12) and Mike Arnaoutis (W 12).

Defense

Excellent foot speed, slickness, and head movement make him a tough target ... Has never been floored or seriously hurt as a pro ... Decent shots from a good puncher in Junior Witter did little damage ... Has been caught on a few other occasions, though never seriously hurt ... Edner Cherry (September 2008) and Jamie Rangel (September 2006) got through with single shots that momentarily buzzed him.

Can be tough to tag when moving and fighting from a distance. Gets in trouble when choosing to stand in front of opponents ... Good head movement and footwork ... Chin is biggest weakness. Was stopped in losses to Thomas Davis and Ricardo Torres ... Was dropped in wins against Jamie Rangel, David Diaz, and Ricardo Torres (twice) ... Usually recovers relatively quickly when hurt, however.

Timothy Bradley

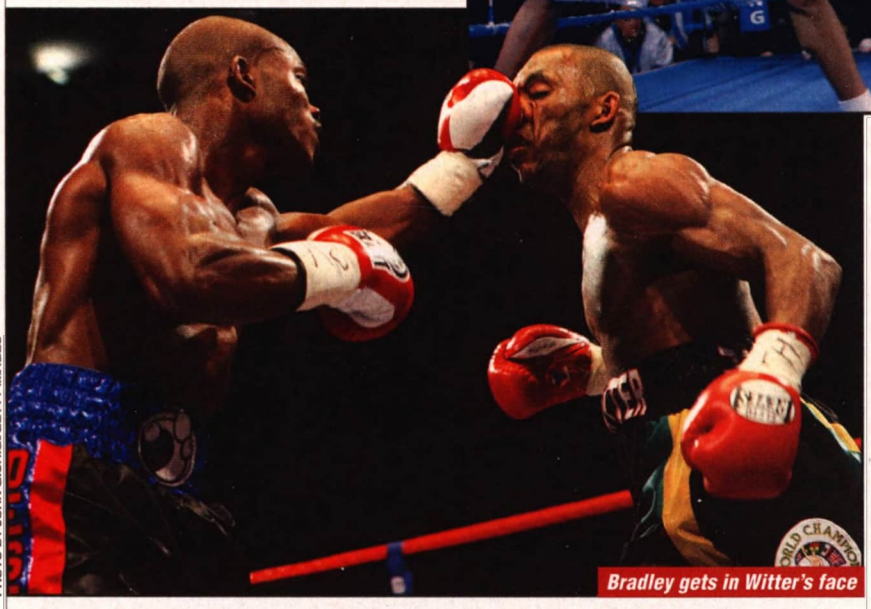
Kendall Holt

Style

Disciplined, multifaceted boxer ... Developed as a pressure fighter, but has showed ability to control action from outside ... Uses speed, strong jab to work his way inside ... Effective counterpuncher ... Excellent bodypuncher who can wear down an opponent ... Good at controlling pace of a fight ... Seems to rise to level of opposition.

Holt has Arnaoutis retreating

PHOTO BY DAN CREIGHTON



Bradley gets in Witter's face

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Aggressive boxer-puncher ... Very mobile fighter most of the time ... Tends to attack in flurries, overwhelming his opponents with quick combinations ... Excellent counterpuncher ... Very good at setting traps for opponents and luring them in for counterattacks ... Capable of a superb technical performance or a highlight-reel brawl ... Has had periods of inconsistency throughout career ... Resiliency is his best trait.

The Questions

How will he overcome Holt's height and mobility? Can he avoid getting caught with a bomb on the way inside? If he does get tagged, will he be able to shake it off? Did he catch a fading Witter at the right moment?

How will he adjust to an opponent with quicker hands? What's Plan B if he can't outbox Bradley early? If he tries to turn it into a brawl, will he get caught on that shaky chin? Has he put his inconsistency behind him?

The Outcome

Bradley continually tries to work his way inside, as he did so effectively against Witter, but Holt's quickness and savvy leads to a different result. Holt's counters earn Bradley's respect, and as the fight progresses, he is increasingly able to keep Bradley at long range. Unanimous decision favors Holt in a mild upset.

[Summary]

Heavyweights
Raymond Olubowale KO 6 Shane Andreesen
Fabio Maldonado KO 1 Adriano Vicente
Odlanier Solis KO 8 Kevin Burnett
Eugene Hill KO 3 Clinton Boldridge
Saul Farah KO 2 Joao Rodrigues de Silva
Tor Hamer KO 2 Darion Moss
Joey Abell KO 1 Derek Amos

Cruiserweights
Victor Ramirez KO 10 Alexander Alekseev
Ehinomen Ehikhamenor W 5 Darnell Wilson
Troy Ross KO 2 Lawrence Tauasa
Laudelino Barros KO 2 Ruy Da Gloria

Light Heavyweights
Zsolt Erdei W 12 Yuri Barashian
Edison Miranda KO 3 Manuel Esparza
Igor Michalkin KO 2 Sergey Beloshapkin
Sean Corbin KO 5 Leon Gilkes

Super Middleweight
Karoly Balzsay W 12 Denis Inkin
Angel Hernandez W 10 James McGirt Jr.
Robert Stielitz KO 4 Dimitri Protunus
Koji Sato KO 2 Martin Avila

Middleweights
Hector Camacho Jr. W 10 Sammy Sparkman
Noe Gonzalaez KO 6 Valentin Antonio Ochoa
Yves Studer KO 11 Vedran Akrap
Marco Avendano KO 2 Ruben Dario Prada
Gennady Golovkin KO 1 Javier Mamani

Junior Middleweights
Yuki Nonaka W 10 Takao Onda
Eromosele Albert W 10 Germaine Sanders
Ivan Sanchez W 10 Marcos Munoz
Ivan Martinez KO 5 Benjamin Murry
Sechew Powell KO 3 Christian Joseph
Carlos Donquiz KO 2 Jhon Licona
Derek Ennis W 8 Clarence Taylor

Welterweights
Andre Berto W12 Luis Collazo
(*Retains WBC Title*)
Jose Luis Castillo KO 2 James Wayca
Arniel Tinampay W 12 Dan Nazareno Jr.
Roberto Belge W 12 Valentyn Kuts
Rodolfo Martinez W 10 Raul Bejarano

PHOTO BY RONNY HARTMAN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Super middleweight Karoly Balzsay wades into Denis Inkin

Damian Frias W 10 Edwin Algarin
Saul Alvarez KO 2 Antonio Fitch
Sadam Ali KO 1 Ricky Thompson
Antwone Smith W 8 Ben Ankrah

Junior Welterweights
Lenny Daws KO 6 Sergejs Savrinovics
Somchai Nakbalee KO 4 Denyaso Sithsaithong

Lightweights
Paulus Moses W 12 Yusuke Kobori
John Murray KO 8 Lee McAllister
Sam Rukindo KO 8 Peter Oluoch
Miguel Acosta KO 4 Onalvi Sierra

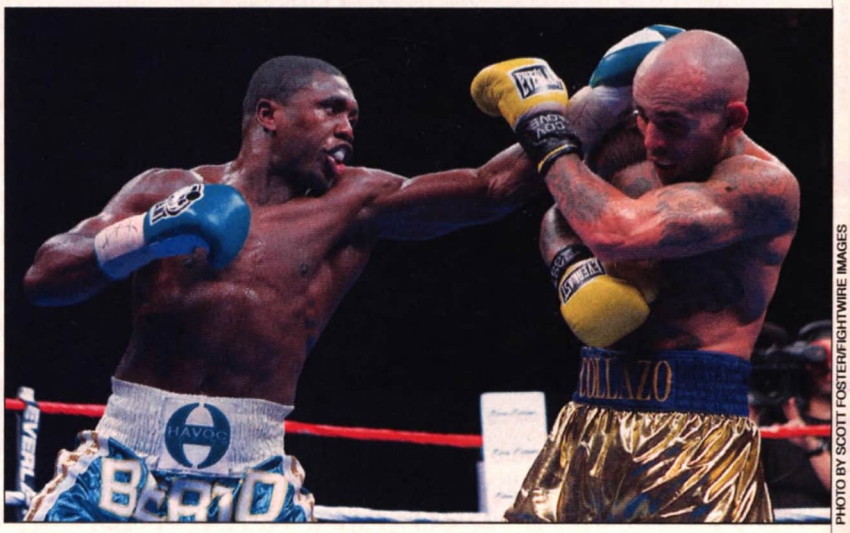


PHOTO BY SCOTT FOSTER/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Welterweight Andre Berto snaps a left jab at Luis Collazo

Marvin Quintero KO 3 Nick Casal
Decha Bankluaygym Tech. Draw 1 Amor Tino
Hideaki Nakamoto W 8 Kazunori Fujita

Junior Lightweights

Yoshimitsu Yashiro W 10 Takashi Miura
Francisco Cordero W 10 Luis Araguayan

Featherweights

Babe Concepcion KO 5 Sande Otieno
Orlando Cruz KO 5 Leonilo Miranda
Chonlatarn Piriyapinyo W 12 Jaime Barcelona
Yuriorkis Gamboa KO 10 Roger Gonzales
John Simpson KO 8 Paul Truscott
Victor Terrazas KO 5 Carlos Medellin
Hirofumi Atsumi KO 5 Shunsuke Sato
Gary Russell Jr. KO 3 Antonio Reyes
Ina Menzer W 10 Esther Schouten
Edgar Gabijan W 8 Ronald Pontillas

Junior Featherweights

Toshiaki Nishioka KO 12 Genaro Garcia
(*Wins WBC Title*)
Marangin Marbun W 10 Carlos Lopez
Jomanz Omanz Tech. Draw 10 Carlo Magale

Bantamweights

Rolly Matsushita W 12 Wethya Sakmuagklaeg
Sasha Bakhtin Tech. Win 10 Sung-Kook Kim
Isack Junior W 8 Rommy Rahayaan
Rie Fujimoto KO 3 Hye-Lim Lee

Junior Bantamweights

Daniel Ferreras W 12 Danilo Pena
Tomas Rojas KO 9 Carlos Rueda
Gerson Guerrero KO 2 Darwin Zamora

Flyweights

Denkaosan Kaovichit KO 2 Takefumi Sakata
(*Wins WBA Title*)
Daisuke Naito KO 11 Shingo Yamaguchi
(*Retains WBC Title*)
Wilbert Uicab KO 10 Jose Cuadros
Ardin Diale W 10 Armando Casa
Ivan Pozo Tech. Win 9 Christophe Rodrigues

Junior Flyweights

Eriberto Gejon W 10 Roldan Castrodes
Arman De La Cruz KO 1 Samransak Singmanassak
Tommy Seran W 10 Ichal Tobida
Michael Landero D 10 Donnie Mabao

Strawweights

Boy Tanto W 10 Johan Wahyudi
Kosuke Ohta KO 3 Yu Shimizu
Teeraporn Pannimit W 6 Winyu Paradorn Gym

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

Featherweight Orlando Cruz punishes Leonilo Miranda

Wladimir Klitschko KO 7 Hasim Rahman

Mannheim, Germany: It was yet another dominant win for Klitschko, 244¾, Kiev, Ukraine, but the praise heaped upon him was minimal, for former world heavyweight champion, Rahman, 253½, Baltimore, Maryland, a substitute opponent for the injured Russian Alexander Povetkin, was never likely to replicate the upset he achieved in 2001 in South Africa when he knocked out Lennox Lewis. Systematically softened up by Klitschko's authoritative, piercing jab, Rahman got floored in round six before succumbing in the seventh at the SAP Arena. It was Klitschko's sixth defense of the IBF heavyweight title and his second defense of the WBO belt.

The 36-year-old American was coming off a no-decision against James Toney after an accidental head clash caused a cut over Rahman's left eye and "The Rock" welcomed a stoppage after three rounds. Since losing the WBC heavyweight belt against Oleg Maskaev in 2006, Rahman had done nothing to merit another title shot, but the dearth of exciting names in the heavyweight division made him a justifiable choice of opponent by Klitcshko when the match with Povetkin fell through. Having begun 2008 with a hesitant performance against Sultan Ibragimov that was widely criticized, Klitschko wanted to close the year in style. His only other fight in 2008, against Tony Thompson, failed to ignite before he stopped the American in 11 rounds.

From the opening round, Klitschko took command against Rahman, firing hard left jabs and overhand rights into the challenger's head. He missed with a couple of lead left hooks, but Rahman was unable to find a way to slip underneath Klitschko's long arms and get inside where he may have been able to cause damage. The jab was Klitschko's key punch and it kept thudding into Rahman's face. The former champ retreated to the ropes in an effort to get a breather from Klitschko's attack, but he merely exposed himself to more punishment. Buddy McGirt, Rahman's trainer, told him to "make it a dogfight," but Klitschko dictated the terms of engagement and kept Rahman at the perfect range to pick him off with his jab, which he landed with impunity.

Rahman got rocked by another jolting jab near the end of the fifth round and a heavy right cross to the chin, and Klitschko, 52-3 (46), came out strong at the start of the sixth, knocking Rahman down with a couple of left hooks. Rahman, 45-7-2 (36) with 1 no-contest, managed to survive the round, but he was ready to surrender as Klitschko maintained his attack and American referee Tony Weeks intervened at 0:44 of round seven.

"Hasim Rahman really got punished, and this is what I have to do in the ring," Klitschko said. "I have to show that I am the master each and every time that I fight."

As of press time, Klitschko's next bout was expected to be against Britain's former world cruiserweight champion, David Haye, or possibly unbeaten California contender Chris Arreola.

Television: **HBO**
Promoter: **K2 Promotions**
(12-13-08)
Brian Doogan

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Klitschko tallies pointless win over Rahman

Nicolay Valuev W 12 Evander Holyfield

Zurich, Switzerland: "The Russian Giant" plodded and the old warrior summoned a performance of defiance from his 46-year-old relic of a body, their lackluster encounter notable mostly for the scoring controversy that ensued. Valuev, 310¾, St. Petersburg, Russia, prevailed against former undisputed champion Holyfield, 214¼, Atlanta, Georgia, by a majority decision to retain the WBA heavyweight title, but the chorus of boos by a 12,500-strong crowd that greeted the verdict at the Hallenstadion echoed all the way across to Holyfield's home turf and the widespread dismay prompted the WBA to launch an official investigation.

The merits of the controversy are debatable. Holyfield was adamant that an injustice had been perpetrated, and his position drew considerable support. The overwhelming majority of TV observers agreed with the audience in Zurich and maintained that Holyfield clearly deserved the nod. But out of 50 writers at ringside who were polled by a Swiss newspaper, 48 of them scored for Valuev. Many of the rounds were close, characterized by little action either way. While Holyfield remained out of harm's way for lengthy periods by circling the perimeter of the ring to frustrate Valuev, he did not land much and it was hardly a vintage "Real Deal" display.

Holyfield made the better start, however, taking advantage of Valuev's slow movement with some nimble footwork and a series of quick, short ambushes with fast and accurate hooks to the Russian's head and body. Valuev, 35, struggled to establish his timing. When he threw a lazy jab, Holyfield countered with an overhand right to the jaw to emphasize that he was in control, and he landed another right on Valuev's chin before the first round was over. Holyfield was not really doing much, but Valuev was doing far less.

This became a theme in the next few rounds as Holyfield remained up on his toes, moving laterally around the ring and moving in infrequently to throw sharp volleys of punches. They caused little damage, but they were enough to win the rounds. It was a tedious spectacle with Holyfield's in-and-out tactics proving effective but only because Valuev appeared to be content to follow him around the ring throwing the occasional jab.

But a subtle shift in momentum occurred before the halfway point when Holyfield's punch output tapered off and Valuev became more effective, finding the range with his jab and stepping up his work. He caught Holyfield with a right uppercut to the jaw and, by the sixth round, the steady if unspectacular accumulation of jabs by Valuev had begun to exact a toll on the veteran challenger, whose weariness may have been exacerbated by his constant movement. Holyfield lunged in with desperate, flailing right hands that missed their target and Valuev commanded the exchanges with an economy of straight, powerful blows. Twice in the ninth round Holyfield lost his balance after being struck by Valuev's thudding jab, and when they engaged in a rare exchange of hard hooks, the Russian gained the upper hand.

Holyfield continued to fade down the stretch and Valuev, 50-1 (34), maintained a grim, unspectacular momentum that carried him over the finish line. Holyfield made a final effort in the 12th round, and if he had won the round, he would have secured the decision, but all three judges gave the round to Valuev. Pierluigi Poppi (Italy) scored 116-112 for Valuev, Mikael Hook (Sweden) had it 115-114 for Valuev, and Guillermo Perez Pineda (Panama) made it 114-114. THE RING scored 115-113 for Valuev. The referee was Luis Pabon (Puerto Rico).

"I think it was just some home cooking for a promoter's fighter," said Holyfield's trainer, Tommy Brooks. "I think somebody was just greasing somebody's palms."

The accusation drew an angry rebuke from Valuev promoter Wilfried Sauerland. "I can understand his disappointment," Sauerland said. "After all, his fighter put on an impressive performance for which he deserves our respect. However, I cannot comprehend his remarks at all. They are derisive,

THE RING Fighter of the Month

Denkaosen Kaovichit

When Denkaosen Kaovichit flew from Anaheim, California, back home to Thailand in 2002, after losing by 11th-round stoppage against Eric Morel in a challenge for the WBA flyweight title, it seemed likely that he was flying off our radar. He came, he tried, he lost his unbeaten record, and he left. It's a formula that has resulted in many a small foreign fighter fading into obscurity.

But Denkaosen has since proven that he is not so easily discouraged. He kept extremely busy at home against unknown opposition, winning 20 straight over 4½ years, and got another shot at the WBA fly title. This time the beltholder was Takefumi Sakata, and Denkaosen fared better than he did against Morel, fighting to a 12-round draw on his opponent's home turf. But that improvement from defeat to draw wasn't good enough. So in his third attempt at the same belt, Denkaosen delivered in a big way. He needed less than six minutes to separate Sakata from his senses and the title.

This time, Denkaosen flew home a winner. And as one of the top flyweights in the world and a man still with only one loss on his record through nearly 50 fights, he flew back onto the radar of hardcore fight fans half a world away.

PHOTO BY AFP/GETTY IMAGES

outrageous, and absolutely untrue. I would not have expected such unsporting behavior from him. We offered Holyfield a rematch straight away, but now we will have to reconsider it."

Holyfield, 42-10-2 (27), made clear that he intends to fight on. "I thought I did everything necessary to win," he said. "I followed the game plan, I didn't get drawn into a toe-to-toe slugfest, and I kept him off-balance for much of the fight. I feel I won more rounds than he did. My goal is to be heavyweight champion of the world again and that has not been changed by this fight. I know who I am. I have a history of proving people wrong, and, although I didn't get the decision tonight, I'll make the adjustments that are necessary and go again for another belt. Hopefully, I can get another title shot."

Television: **Pay-Per-View**
Promoter: **Wilfried Sauerland**
(12-20-08)
Brian Doogan

Denkaosen Kaovichit KO 2 Takefumi Sakata

Hiroshima, Japan: Perennial top contender Denkaosen, 111¾, Thailand, very impressively captured the WBA flyweight belt as he caught defending titlist Sakata, 112, with a vicious right under the ear to finish him at 2:55 of the second round at Sun Plaza Hall. It was an emphatic ending, in sharp contrast to their first meeting, when they battled to a split draw in November 2007.

Nobody doubted that Denkaosen was a dangerous challenger, having seen him drop Sakata with a solid right in the first round of their initial battle and earn a draw despite fracturing his right thumb in the fourth round and fighting with one hand thereafter. However, it was hard to foresee such a devastating, dramatic, and quick knockout by the 32-year-old Thai veteran, since Sakata, 28, had been known for his tremendous durability and determination in every defense.

Everyone knew Sakata, who was making his fifth defense, was a slow starter. The Japanese fighting machine made it a point to accelerate his work rate as the contest progressed, but in the early rounds, he nearly always looked terrible. And in this fight, he couldn't get through the early rounds and make his charge.

From the outset, Denkaosen, a hard hitter with a vaunted right hand, landed strong shots as if aiming for a first-round knockout. The Thailander set up with solid left jabs to the belly, then threw vicious rights. In the final seconds of the round, Sakata scored with a good left hook following a left-right combination, and he won the round convincingly.

In round two, Sakata kept rushing in on Denkaosen and welcomed infighting at close quarters, which turned out to be a mistake. He was trying to smother the Thai, but it didn't work. Denkaosen dug solid bodyshots at close range to put Sakata on the defensive.

With just 15 seconds remaining in the round, the Thailander landed a devastating right to the beltholder's jaw, just under the ear. It was so powerful and so well-timed that Sakata's body abruptly went stiff, then crashed down.

Sakata stayed completely flat until referee Roberto Ramirez (Puerto Rico) tolled eight, and then he wobblingly attempted to regain his feet. The ref's count had already reached 10 when Sakata almost stood up with rubbery legs. As his cornerman and trainer Shigeyuki Otake carried him to the corner, Sakata looked like he was made of jelly. The new titlist cried for joy.

It was shocking that Sakata, who had never tasted a loss either by a knockout or a TKO, was crushed so easily. The crestfallen ex-titleholder couldn't remember what happened, asking his cornermen in the dressing room, "What punch finished me?"

The newly crowned Denkaosen, 45-1-1 (19), jubilantly said, "I am very happy to win the belt from Sakata, the strong champion. I tried to knock him out to capture the world title. I am very happy to do it quickly."

Denkaosen is completely free from any enforced defense (since he was the mandatory coming in), so he will be able to choose his first challenger. There is talk already of popular Japanese fighter Koki Kameda getting the opportunity.

It is uncertain whether Sakata, 33-5-2 (15), will go on fighting in the flyweight division, move up to the 115-pound class, or hang up his gloves for good.

Promoter: **Kyoei Promotions**
(12-31-08)
Joe Koizumi

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Kaowichit en route to emphatic kayo of Sakata

Zsolt Erdei W 12 Yuri Barashian

Magdeburg, Germany: Having failed by almost two pounds to make the 175-pound light heavyweight limit at the official weigh-in, Barashian, 176¾, Feodosia, Ukraine, via Armenia, lost his chance to challenge for the WBO title, though very few gave him a realistic chance of winning anyway. Surprisingly, in this non-title 12-rounder, he actually caused quite a bit of trouble for Erdei, 173, Hamburg, Germany, via Budapest, Hungary, at Bordelandhalle. Erdei controlled much of the opening six rounds, but over the second half of the bout he sustained heavy punishment and his face was badly marked at the finish.

Barashian was coming off a clear loss against WBA beltholder Hugo Garay in July 2008 in Argentina, but his reputation as a durable adversary proved to be more relevant. Erdei had twice overcome Garay in close, competitive bouts, and he had to come through some torrid exchanges to stay on top of Barashian, who was unbeaten for five years before his defeat by Garay. "I have a strong opponent, who is an intelligent and clever boxer and he showed his quality against Thomas Ulrich," said Erdei, referring to Barashian's eighth-round stoppage to win the European title against the tough German who had gone the distance when he challenged Erdei in 2006.

PHOTO BY RONNY HARTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Erdei decisions overweight Barashian in non-title bout

Erdei began the bout assertively, utilizing his jab and sharp combination punching to strike fast and frequently against his southpaw opponent. He was also elusive, and his ability to make Barashian miss strengthened his confidence. The Ukrainian was hurt by a jolting jab in the second round, and Erdei followed it up with a battery of blows to close the round strongly. By the third round, however, Barashian was starting to find his range with the jab and he caught Erdei with a solid bodyshot in round four, which he supplemented with a hard left cross to the head.

Barashian was warned by Puerto Rican referee Roberto Ramirez for landing a left hand low in round five, but he battled inside in the sixth and caught Erdei with a range of hooks and crosses to the head and body. Erdei's jab was having a negligible effect and Barashian came on strong, catching the titlist with strong blows in round seven that left the Germany-based Hungarian dazed and concerned. Barashian's edge in power was having a telling effect.

Erdei, 30-0 (17), became a more stationary target the longer the fight went on, but he gained a breather in the ninth round when Barashian, 25-5 (17), allowed another left hand to stray low and the referee penalized him a point. Still, Erdei continued to be picked off by the Ukrainian's powershots, and a clash of heads near the end of the round opened a cut above Erdei's left eyebrow. The 34-year-old titleholder cut a sorry figure and he had to drag himself through a series of torturous blows to his head and body over the final rounds to last the distance. Jose Hiram Rivera (Portugal) scored 116-111, Andre Van Grootenbruel (Belgium) 117-110, and Eugenia Williams (USA) 116-111, all for Erdei. THE RING scored 115-112 for Erdei.

Promoter: **Universum Box**

(1-10-09)

Brian Doogan

Karoly Balzsay W 12 Denis Inkin

Magdeburg, Germany: Busier, stronger, and hungrier, Balzsay, 167, Hamburg, Germany, via Kecskemet, Hungary, outworked and overpowered Inkin, Hamburg, Germany, via Novosibirsk, Russia, to win the WBO super middleweight title at Bordelandhalle. It was Inkin's first defense of the belt that he won against Fulgencio Zuniga following world light heavyweight champion Joe Calzaghe's abdication at 168 pounds.

With two unbeaten fighters vying for the title, promoter Peter Kohl elevated this bout to main event status when Yuri Barashian failed to make weight for his challenge of WBO light heavyweight titleholder Zsolt Erdei. The contrasting styles made for an interesting encounter. Inkin's jab was a feature of the fight, but Balzsay, 20-0 (14), landed the better combinations and he carried a bigger dig, which became a factor as the bout progressed. Inkin, 34-1 (24), landed a succession of quality jabs in the opening round, but even then Balzsay's sharp burst of hard blows caught the Germany-based Russian off-guard.

This became clear in the second and third rounds when the challenger was able to take the play away with his fast, accurate, and powerful punching. Inkin, 31, tried to keep the fight at long range, but Balzsay, 29, had success when he managed to evade Inkin's jab and work on the inside. Undaunted, Inkin came back strongly over the next couple of rounds, moving well behind his jab and landing right crosses and meaty hooks.

The pace was proving a problem for Inkin, however. Balzsay was able to boss him in the sixth round and, although Inkin responded strongly in the seventh, the physical toll was clearly telling. Balzsay took over in the eighth round as Inkin's resistance ebbed away and the challenger's combinations became ever more threatening. A hard left hand by the southpaw drove Inkin back on his heels in round 10, and Balzsay landed two more lefts to the jaw. Both fighters had swelling around their right eyes, but Inkin looked drained as well and it required a huge effort on his part to mount a rally in the final round and tag Balzsay with jabs and right hands. It was the classic example of too little too late.

Manfred Kuechler (Germany) scored 115-113 while Roberto Ramirez (Puerto Rico) and Eugenia Williams (USA) both

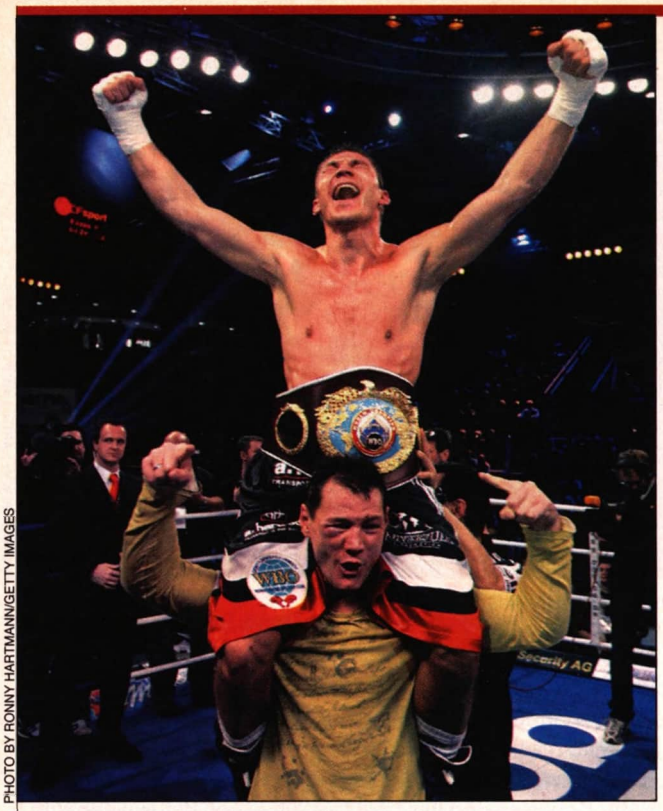

PHOTO BY RONNY HARTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Balzsay celebrates title-winning victory over Inkin

scored 116-112, all for Balzsay. THE RING also scored 116-112. The referee was Jose Hiram Rivera (Portugal).

Promoter: **Universum Box**

(1-10-09)

Brian Doogan

Humberto Soto W 12 Francisco Lorenzo

Cozumel, Mexico: Well, it wasn't as memorable as their first fight. But it was a lot more satisfying, on account of the fact that this time, the right guy won.

Six months earlier, on the undercard of Manny Pacquiao's victory over David Diaz, Lorenzo topped Soto in one of 2008's most controversial results. Soto, Tijuana, Mexico, was dominating the fight, knocked down Lorenzo, Irvington, New Jersey, via San Cristobal, Dominican Republic, and got disqualified by referee Joe Cortez for a grazing late punch when Lorenzo was already in the process of conceding defeat. The bout was for the "interim" WBC 130-pound title, and adding to the controversy, the WBC refused to recognize the result, and instead gave Soto another chance to win the interim title in his next bout, which he did by stopping Gamaliel Diaz. With Pacquiao having officially vacated the super featherweight title shortly thereafter, Soto-Lorenzo II became for the full WBC belt.

And this time, nobody could deny Soto, 130, his victory. As in the first fight, Lorenzo, 130, could get little business done, while the accurate-punching Mexican found the target with regularity at Parque Andres Quintana Roo. He didn't hurt the 37-year-old Lorenzo with regularity, like he did the first time around, but he piled up the points, and Lorenzo made the gap even wider by fighting dirty and getting penalized. Lorenzo, 33-5 (14), headbutted, threw low blows, and held, and referee Jay Nady (USA) correctly deducted one point in the eighth round and another in the ninth.

After 12 rounds, the 28-year-old Soto, 46-7-2 (29) with 1 no-contest, was the clear winner. Judge Robert Tapper (Canada) saw it 118-108, while Duane Ford (USA) and Ged O'Conner (USA) both had it 117-109.

Presumably, there's no need now for a Soto-Lorenzo III. In fact, Soto might not defend the 130-pound belt at all, as there's talk of him moving up to the more lucrative lightweight division.

Television: **Pay-Per-View**

Promoters: **Promociones Zanfer, Promociones Jose "Pepe" Gomez**

(12-20-08)

Toshiaki Nishioka KO 12 Genaro Garcia

Yokohama, Japan: Slick Japanese southpaw Nishioka, 121½, kept the WBC super bantam throne as he floored Mexican warrior Garcia, 122, twice and finally chalked up a TKO victory at 0:57 of the 12th and final round at Pacifico Arena. Based on the announced interim scores of 40-35 twice and 39-36 after the fourth, then 80-72, 79-72, and 78-73 after the eighth, you might imagine it was a lopsided contest. But it wasn't at all. Nishioka, 32, had a tough time coping with Garcia's persistent, if not accurate, attacks, and the 31-year-old Mexican battler's stamina and willpower were superb enough to win the praise of the crowd. But it couldn't win him the title belt.

The Japanese titlist started well, countering Garcia, who kept rushing in recklessly. Nishioka's southpaw lefts were catching the onrushing wide-open target perfectly, and when the beltholder dropped the bruised challenger with a countering left uppercut only 20 seconds into the fourth, it looked like Nishioka would finish the affair that round. But instead, Garcia became more aggressive after suffering the knockdown and took the play away from his opponent.

Extending his right hand to keep Garcia from boring in, Nishioka began to retreat (rather than side-step) and only counter (rather than positively attack). Despite his defensive approach, Nishioka won the fifth, seventh, and eighth, while the challenger earned a point in the sixth. Though Nishioka's lead was growing, the result was in doubt because of Garcia's furious attack. Nishioka, however, decked Garcia with a well-timed southpaw left again midway in the ninth, which hurt the game Mexican and diminished his fighting spirit.

With his nose bleeding, Garcia, 38-7 (22), kept coming forward, but his combinations were slower and less accurate than in previous rounds. Nishioka changed his gear from backward to forward in the 10th and battered the fading Mexican with solid lefts to the face.

In the 12th, Nishioka could have run to conserve his huge lead on points, but instead the upright lefty turned loose and took part in hot exchanges with the depleted Mexican. Battering his exhausted rival, Nishioka almost floored him for a third time, but referee Bruce McTavish, a New Zealander

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Nishioka with his daughter and trophy after beating Garcia

living in the Philippines, declared a well-received halt with the challenger still on his feet.

Although he made a successful defense, Nishioka, 33-4-3 (20), didn't look as sharp and strong as expected. One of his cornermen revealed afterward that Nishioka had hurt his right hand in the fifth.

Promoter: **Teiken Promotions**
(1-3-09)
Joe Koizumi

Joan Guzman W 12 Ameth Diaz

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: How does an alphabet group punish a fighter for failing to make weight and screwing his opponent out of a paycheck? By recognizing his next fight as a title eliminator and setting him up with a mediocre opponent to boot.

Guzman missed the lightweight limit by more than three pounds for his scheduled September bout with Nate Campbell, and though that burned his bridges with some of boxing's power brokers, it apparently didn't bother the WBA one bit. Somehow, Panamanian journeyman Diaz, who'd been knocked out in five of his seven losses, was deemed a worthy opponent for the immensely talented Dominican, and the near-shutout result was wholly expected.

Guzman's most significant success was not winning the fight at Palacio de Deportes, but rather making weight the day before. He hit 135 on the dot, and then came the easy part. The 32-year-old two-division former titlist had far too much hand speed and fancy footwork for the 25-year-old Diaz, 134½. There was no evidence of rust despite Guzman's 13-month layoff since his impressive win over Humberto Soto in Atlantic City, and no hiccups working with new trainer Robert Garcia, who replaced Floyd Mayweather Sr. One of the judges didn't give Diaz a single round, scoring it 120-108, while the other two were a bit more compassionate to the underdog, seeing the fight 119-109.

With the win, Guzman moved to 29-0 (17), while Diaz dropped to 25-8 (9). The referee was Benji Esteves (USA).

Television: **Pay-Per-View**
(12-20-08)

Paulus Moses W 12 Yusuke Kobori

Yokohama, Japan: Unbeaten Namibian Moses, 133½, rose from obscurity to capture the WBA "regular" lightweight belt as he outworked the game and gutsy Kobori, 132½, Japan, withstood the local fighter's retaliation in the middle rounds, and won a unanimous decision at the end of 12 hard-fought rounds at Pacifico Arena. Nate Campbell is the WBA's "super champion," making Moses' title irrelevant to many fans.

Even if the fight didn't mean as much as some other title fights, it was still an outstanding fight from an entertainment perspective. It may be a bit early to discuss Fight of the Year candidates, but this could remain a candidate at year's end. Both fighters gave all that they had, swapping punches from start to finish. Moses was superior in terms of speed, skills, and ring generalship, while Kobori showed his undaunted fighting spirit.

In the end, fighting spirit wasn't enough, as judges Roberto Ramirez (Puerto Rico) and Pinit Prayadsab (Thailand) both had it 115-113 for Moses, while Derek Milham (Australia) saw it 119-109. The close scores were presumably based on Kobori's furious aggressiveness, while the wider score must have favored Moses' constant jabs and superior ring generalship.

Moses, 28, was an inch taller and had a longer reach by five inches. He commenced the action by scoring with stinging lefts and quick left-right combinations. The 27-year-old Kobori, who had dethroned little-known Nicaraguan Jose Alfaro last May, covered up well and attempted to counter with his trademark left hooks.

Nestor Tobias, Moses' longtime manager/trainer, saw that Kobori was most dangerous at close quarters and suggested his man utilize his footwork and stick to a hit-and-run strategy from the sixth round onward. After that, Kobori's best weapon, a counter left hook, became less fruitful.

Kobori became much more aggressive in the seventh and eighth, and he won the eighth on all cards (including the card of judge Milham, who gave the other 11 rounds to Moses). The ninth round saw Moses slip down as Kobori missed a big left hook. It might have looked like a knockdown from the balcony, but it was just a slip. Kobori suddenly swarmed over Moses and had the challenger retreating, earning the round on two judges' scorecards.

In the last three rounds, Kobori held his hands low and

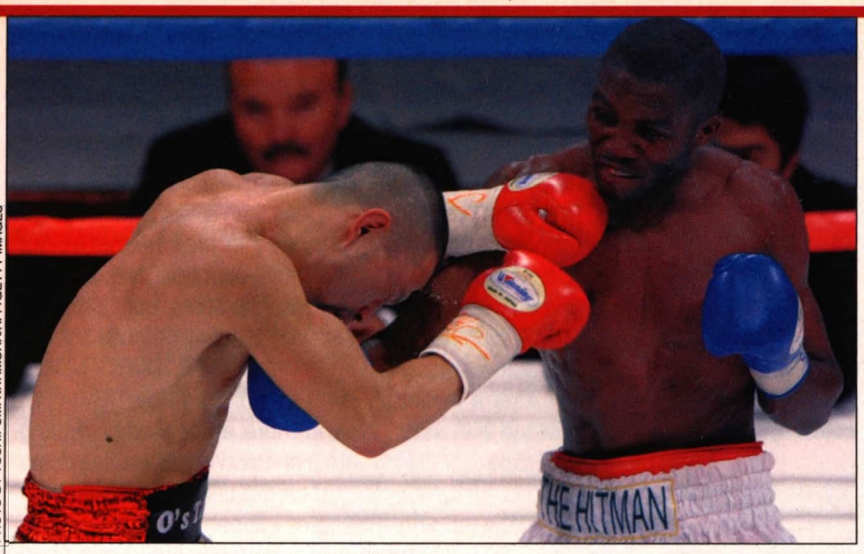

PHOTO BY TOSHIFUMI KITAMURA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Moses takes WBA "regular" lightweight title from Kobori

invited Moses to engage in a slugfest, but the cautious and prudent Moses never accepted his offer. He diligently kept outjabbing, outboxing, and outlegging the willing mixer, and Moses rather easily piled up points in the final frames.

And they were important final frames, since two judges had the fight 95-95 after 10.

If Kobori, 23-3-1 (12), had dominated the last two rounds, he could have retained the belt. But instead it was Moses, 24-0 (17), who displayed his excellent physical power and technique—even in the last two sessions, he threw sharp and snappy jabs and one-twos with good form.

There's talk of Moses possibly facing Marco Antonio Barrera next, and though the Mexican veteran is well past his best, his name would lend credibility to Moses' dubious title reign if the Namibian was to beat him.

Promoters: **Don King Productions/Kadoebi Jewel Promotions in association with Teiken Promotions**

(1-3-09)

Joe Koizumi

Jackson Bonsu W 12 Carlos Baldomir

Antwerp, Belgium: Although hailing originally from Ghana, Bonsu, 147, Antwerp, Belgium, has become a popular attraction in his adoptive home city, where his aggressive tactics and willingness to stand toe-to-toe earned him a victory by majority decision against former world champion Baldomir, 147, Los Angeles, California, via Sante Fe, Argentina. The fight was a WBC welterweight title eliminator in front of an 8,000-strong capacity crowd at the Lotto Arena.

Baldomir rose from obscurity to overcome Zab Judah and Arturo Gatti in successive fights in 2006 before Floyd Mayweather relieved him of THE RING welterweight title. In his next bout, he lost to Vernon Forrest on points for the vacant WBC 154-pound title. Following an unimpressive comeback win and a 13-month layoff, this was an opportunity to secure another title crack, against WBC titlist Andre Berto, so the Argentine was willing to travel into hostile territory. Baldomir was his usual bulldozing self, forcing Bonsu to fight at a fast pace throughout and, despite the fact that many of the punches Bonsu threw missed their target, the 27-year-old transplanted African did enough to persuade the judges that he was worth the win.

Much of the bout was contested at close range with both fighters maintaining a high output. Baldomir appeared to demonstrate the greater degree of accuracy, however, and did not allow a clash of heads that caused a cut near his left eye (and for which Bonsu was penalized a point by Belgian referee Daniel Van de Wiele) to disrupt his rhythm. Baldomir's punches were better and he nailed Bonsu with right uppercuts and left hooks, but the former European titleholder doggedly hung in and punched back. Even when he missed, the crowd cheered.

Bonsu received another point deduction in round seven when he clashed heads with Baldomir again, and he lost the remainder of the round by being outworked, but he came back strongly later in the fight. Baldomir, 44-12-6 (13), was staggered by a right-left combination to the head in the 11th round and, with blood running down his face from the cut, he had to dig deep to come through further hard punches to his head and body. Bonsu, 30-2 (23), rocked Baldomir with left hooks and rights to the jaw in the final round and picked his punches better, hurting the South American again with an overhand right to the jaw as Baldomir backed against the ropes. But the 37-year-old stayed on his feet and he believed that he had done enough to win at the final bell.

Bela Florian (Hungary) scored 113-113, but Laurentino Ramirez Oropeza (Mexico) and Esa Lehtosaari (Finland) scored 114-113 and 114-112, respectively, for Bonsu. THE RING scored 114-112 for Baldomir.

Promoter: **Promotions Sport Entertainment**

(12-20-09)

Brian Doogan

Daisuke Naito KO II Shingo Yamaguchi

Tokyo, Japan: The free-swinging Naito, 112, made his fourth successful defense of the WBC flyweight belt as he put on a tricky, unorthodox, and almost comical performance, ending with an 11th-round knockdown and stoppage of challenger Yamaguchi, 111¾. Naito is perhaps the trickiest and most awkward major titlist in boxing, and his wild swings from all angles eventually took out Yamaguchi.

The challenger had an ambitious crack at the WBA fly throne against compatriot Takefumi Sakata last March, scoring a knockdown before losing a unanimous nod. But against Naito, who had physical advantages in height, reach, and strength, Yamaguchi was simply overpowered.

From the start, Naito took the initiative with his aggressive swings. Ducking low, the bandy-legged titlist awkwardly moved side to side and unleashed powerful punches from

PHOTO BY STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Comical Naito (right) overpowers Yamaguchi

unusual angles. Yamaguchi initially looked bewildered by the roundhouse rallies of Naito, who was in comfortable command in the first three rounds.

In the fourth, Yamaguchi began tossing wild combinations, and both fighters gradually lost their technique, throwing increasingly looping shots and slugging to the delight of the crowd. Yamaguchi fought Naito toe-to-toe and seemingly won the round. After the fourth, the WBC's open scoring system indicated Naito was ahead 39-37 twice and 40-36.

After that one good round, Yamaguchi went right back to being confused by his opponent's style. Naito appeared to sweep the next four rounds, and the tallies after the eighth were 79-73, 79-74, and 78-74.

Yamaguchi, 29, knew he wouldn't be able to win without knocking Naito out, so he turned loose, while the beltholder became much more cautious, keeping his distance and seemingly trying to sit on his lead. As a result, Yamaguchi dominated the ninth and 10th rounds.

Yamaguchi went all-out in round 11, but the 34-year-old Naito responded to his two-fisted attack with heavy counters. Naito, 34-2-3 (22), connected with a solid right swing to the side of the face, and down went Yamaguchi, 23-6-2 (9). The challenger got up and fought back fiercely, but during a busy exchange in the center of the ring, a left hook caught the challenger. Yamaguchi became groggy, as he kept throwing slow-motion punches while staying on his feet. But Japanese referee Yuji Fukuchi called a halt at 1:12 of the round, and Yamaguchi fell down immediately after the well-timed stoppage.

Promoter: **Miyata Promotions**
(12-23-08)
Joe Koizumi

Yuriorkis Gamboa KO 10 Roger Gonzalez

Primm, Nevada: Electrifying Cuban Olympian Gamboa has the talent, swagger, and charisma to be one of the most exciting fighters in the game. But throw him in against a stubborn opponent focused on survival, and apparently even Gamboa can wage a snoozer once in a while.

While he dominated most of the way and picked up a last-round knockout (albeit on a questionable stoppage), the rising prospect looked less than stellar against fringe contender "Speedy" Gonzalez in their featherweight clash at Buffalo Bill's Star Arena. Gamboa, 126, suffered his third knockdown in his last four fights, but Gonzalez, 127½, didn't do much else besides play defense against his quicker opponent.

After a feeling-out first round, Gamboa, 13-0 (11), started the second round more aggressively, driving Gonzalez, 27-3 (18), into a corner. With Gonzalez doing so little offensively, Gamboa got careless and threw a low, lazy jab after Gonzalez slipped out of the corner. Gonzalez countered with a perfectly timed overhand right that had Gamboa briefly down on one knee.

Unhurt, Gamboa went back on the attack immediately after action resumed, and Gonzalez landed just two additional punches in the round according to CompuBox. The 2004 Olympic gold medalist's recklessness also led to knockdowns in wins against Darling Jimenez (W 10) and Marcos Ramirez (KO 2) last year.

"He got me off-balance," Gamboa told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "It was the only time in the fight that he really hit me. But I wasn't hurt or anything. It was a clean shot, though."

The Cuban defector dominated the rest of the way, but at times looked as if he wasn't sure whether to play it safe from the outside or be himself and go for the crowd-pleasing knockout. It didn't help that Gonzalez kept his distance and averaged only 21 punches thrown per round over the first three rounds. The 30-year-old Chino, California, resident switched up and began moving forward in the fifth, but still averaged just 24 punches over rounds four through eight.

Gamboa piled up points with his dazzling hand speed and combinations, though he seldom landed a clean shot through his defensive-minded opponent's guard. Gonzalez, who couldn't make the 126-pound limit, seemed to be wearing down late. Before the ninth, his corner mistakenly told the fighter that it was the final round, and Gonzalez responded with his busiest three minutes of the night (31 punches).

Out of gas in the 10th, Gonzalez was staggered repeatedly before Gamboa drove him into the ropes with a right uppercut in the final minute. Gamboa's follow-up barrage caused Gonzalez to lose his mouthpiece, and referee Robert Byrd (USA) stepped in to end the sloppy fight with 48 seconds remaining. Gamboa was flurrying, though Gonzalez didn't appear to be seriously hurt and seemed more than capable of lasting those final 48 seconds.

Gonzalez clapped for Gamboa after the 27-year-old's hand was raised and didn't seem too upset by the stoppage.

Television: **ESPN2**
Promoter: **Arena Box**
(1-9-09) ■

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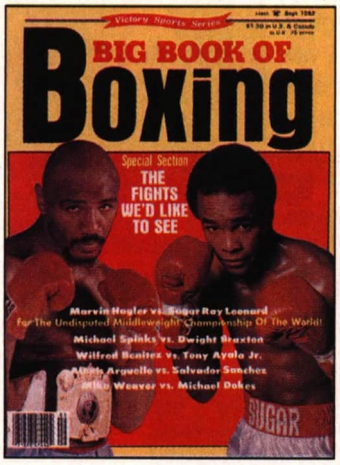

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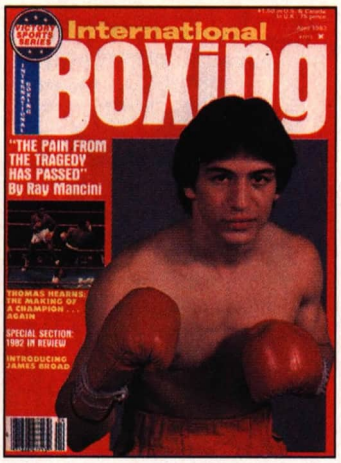

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[New Faces]

(Continued from Page 112)

Kietyongyuth Gym in Bangkok. It was at this time that the gym owner bestowed his fighting name, Saddam Kietyongyuth.

He lived in the gym, sleeping on the floor, and training two to three times per day, while at the same time attending school. Unlike many fighters in the country, Kietyongyuth finished high school, and along the way he learned to speak English fluently, equally rare for Thai fighters.

"Those days in the gym were tough," Kietyongyuth admitted. "Now I sleep in a comfortable bed, in a comfortable apartment, and my life is much different. But it's no problem to sleep in the gym again, on the floor. I haven't forgotten where I came from."

By the time Kietyongyuth was 13, he was fighting in Rajdamnern and Lumpini Stadiums, Thailand's two most prestigious Muay Thai venues. By 17, he had won the Rajdamnern Stadium title, as well as the yearly Mitsubishi Million Baht ($30,000) Eight-Man Tournament.

His Muay Thai career took him throughout Thailand, South Korea, Japan, and France. In Japan, just three months after turning 18, Kietyongyuth suffered a devastating third-round knockout at the hands of Hisayuki Kanazawa.

"I learned from that loss," said Kietyongyuth. "I learned the importance of training properly and being mentally prepared. After winning my first three fights in Japan, I was overconfident. Never again. I was also having problems in my gym at the time, so I took a year off before fighting again. The time off helped and I think I became a better fighter for it.

"There came a point in my career when I was knocking out everyone with my hands," he continued, holding up his fists. "It made sense for me to get into professional boxing. There are more opportunities than in Muay Thai, the money is better, and my name can become more well-known internationally."

In May 2004, Kietyongyuth embarked upon his professional boxing career,

PHOTO BY SCOTT MALLON

Kietyongyuth attacks Yeshmagambetov en route to a fifth-round TKO victory. Kietyongyuth's promoter is trying to buck the Thai tradition of matching is fighter against sup-par opposition.

scoring a first-round knockout against Munukifi Suivu. For the next two years, Kietyongyuth toiled under One Songchai Promotions, fighting the usual no-name opponents common to Thai fighters, receiving small purses, and going nowhere fast.

He could have continued down the path familiar to an uncountable number of Thai fighters, feasting upon inferior opposition and padding his record while waiting for an opportunity to fight for any alphabet trinket available. However, fate stepped in and changed his life dramatically.

While training alongside Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai at the Sityodthong Gym, Kietyongyuth met Potter, a businessman and boxing aficionado. The Australian visited the gym frequently and was looking for fighters for his new promotional outfit, AsiaBox. Kietyongyuth was in the right place at the right time. Potter wanted him to fight under his promotional banner, and from that point the Thai's career took off.

"In Thailand, fighters are beholden to their promoters," said Kietyongyuth. "From my experience in Muay Thai fights overseas, I realized I needed a change if I was to ever become a world champion in boxing. I want to fight the best to challenge myself, not fight one guy after another who doesn't have a chance."

"How is he going to learn his craft fighting those types of fighters?" asked Potter. "This is a big problem here in Thailand; promoters are unwilling to take risks with their fighters and the fighters suffer because of it. We want to prepare Saddam for when he fights the best. The only way I know how to do this is to make sure he's got great camps and good sparring partners and to make sure he's continually challenged in the ring."

Shaking free of his promotional contract with One Songchai Promotions wasn't without difficulties. The contract was weak, even by Thai standards, asking Kietyongyuth "to promise to fight with One Songchai Promotions for the duration of his career or until he quit fighting."

Now free of legal entanglements and with sufficient financial backing, Kietyongyuth is ready to make his move. He frequently travels to Australia, training at Johnny Lewis' gym and sparring with veterans Nedal Hussein, Lovemore Ndou, and Gairy St. Clair. In the near future, Kietyongyuth will travel to the United States for sparring, and if Potter has his way, Kietyongyuth will spar with Manny Pacquiao, another step in the learning process.

Both Kietyongyuth and Potter are acutely aware of the importance of finding increasingly skilled opposition instead of the usual Filipino and Indonesian cannon fodder so prevalent in Thailand.

"As a foreign promoter in Thailand, it's extremely difficult to find willing sparring partners and good opponents," said Potter. "But I'm determined to do whatever it takes to make Saddam a champion."

Kietyongyuth is just as determined. "Boxing is my life," he said. "I refuse to lose." ■

Scott Mallon is THE RING's Thailand correspondent and the editor of asianboxingnew.com

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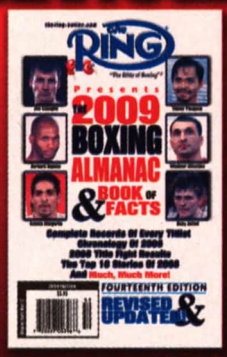

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November 1961

COVER STORY: "Alejandro Lavorante: The New Heavyweight Hope" by Nat Fleischer shines the spotlight on Argentinean contender Lavorante, who had crashed THE RING ratings by knocking out Zora Folley in May, and followed up with three more wins to bring his record to 16-1 (13) at the time this article was written.

According to Fleischer, former heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey had spotted Lavorante fighting in several amateur bouts in Caracas, Venezuela, and thought enough of his potential to pay the fighter's fare to the United States.

"The 25-year-old Argentinean stands 6'3", is clever, possesses a sock, and is a stand-up boxer," wrote Fleischer. "His improvement in recent months has been remarkable, due to the steady personal attention given the fighter by [manager Pinky] George during his daily training sessions."

Sadly, the cover story marked the high point of Lavorante's career. Three fights later, he lost a hotly disputed split decision to George Logan, but bounced back with a kayo of Von Clay and was favored going into a March '62 bout with former light heavyweight champion Archie Moore. But the 47-year-old Moore gave him such a terrific beating that Lavorante was carried from the ring on a stretcher.

Lavorante was back in the same L.A. Sports Arena ring less than four months later, where he suffered a fifth-round knockout at the hands of Muhammad Ali.

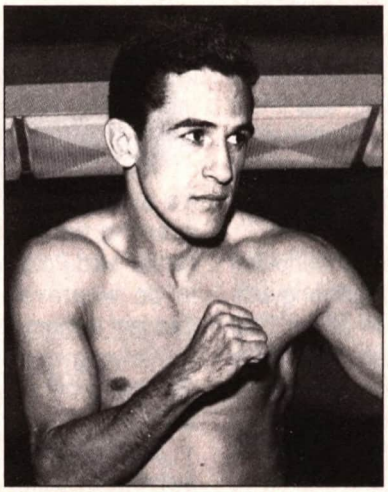
It's difficult to say for certain how much damage was done in the Moore and Ali fights, but when Lavorante next fought, against John Riggins (who had lost five of his last six fights) in September, he was knocked out in the sixth round and never recovered. Sixteen months later, Lavorante died of his injuries.

World Champions

(for the period ended September 21)
Heavyweight: Floyd Patterson
Light Heavyweight: Archie Moore
Middleweight: Terry Downes
Welterweight: Emile Griffith
Lightweight: Joe Brown
Featherweight: Davey Moore
Bantamweight: Eder Jofre
Flyweight: Pone Kingpetch

"Winner—Jofre A Great Champion" was written by Fleischer after the editor was one of the three official judges for Eder Jofre's seventh-round TKO of Ramon Arias on August 19 in Caracas.

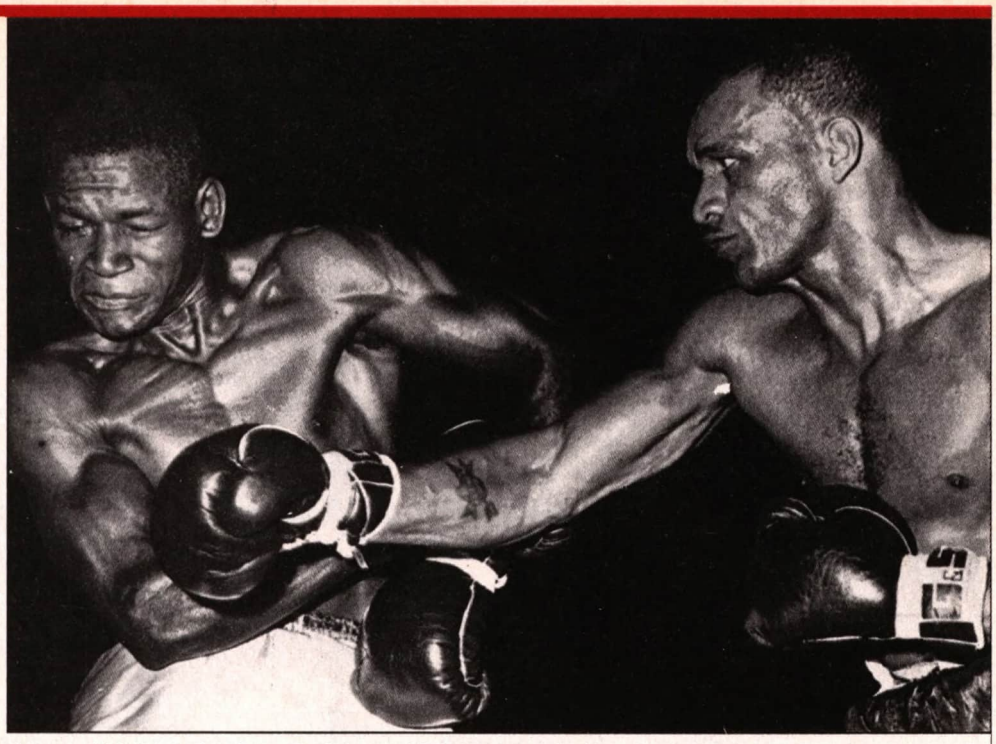
"The 25-year-old, handsome world bantam king well deserves the acclaim he has received," wrote Fleischer. "He is by far the best the division has had in many years ... Jofre stands out as did Ray Robinson for many years in the welter and middleweight divisions."



Jofre: All-time Brazilian great

Fleischer's praise turned out to be well deserved. Brazilian Jofre defended the 118-pound title seven times, and after losing the belt in 1965, he eventually captured the featherweight championship in '73, and retired in '76 with only two losses in 78 bouts. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1992.

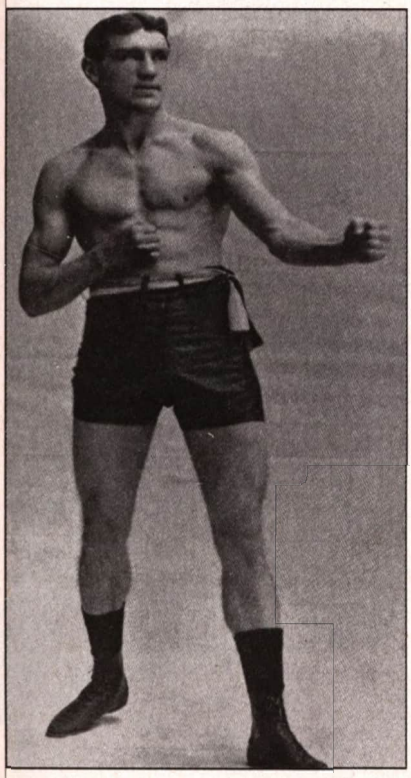
"Fidel Stops Boxing, Cubans Move Out" announced Castro's outlawing of professional boxing in a rather nearsighted and sarcastic manner: "Whatever else [ousted dictator Fulgencio] Batista may have been, he was a friend of boxing, baseball, and, in fact, all sports. It was Batista who built the big sports arena in Havana, one of the finest in the world. Fidel now can devote it to literary readings from the *Life And Times Of Mr. Whiskers*," read the closing paragraph written by somebody identified as "Our Man In Havana" in the table of contents.



Johnson (right) outpoints Cotton in defense of light heavyweight title

"Philadelphia Jack O'Brien: Arch Faker" by Dan Daniels, writing as "The Ring Detective," delves into the checkered career of the one-time light heavyweight champion who, in 1907, had signed and published a statement in which he said that nearly all of his fights were fakes.

"Why did O'Brien issue that startling statement?" wondered Daniels. "How much was based on truth and how much on his hatred of Tommy Burns, whom he named as a fellow conspirator who had given him the double cross?"



How many of O'Brien's fights were fixed?

Daniels examined a number of O'Brien's allegedly fixed fights, some of which, such as his April 20, 1903, bout with Joe Walcott, were considered a sham from the start. Others were not as clear-cut, and Daniels concluded somewhat ambiguously by writing that O'Brien, "but for his confession, would have gone into history of the roped arena as a great fighter and the grand benefactor of boxing."

"Johnson Retains Title" is Ruggles G. Larson's account of the NBA light heavyweight title fight between titleholder Harold Johnson, of Philadelphia, and hometown veteran Eddie Cotton at the Sick's Stadium in Seattle, Washington.

"The fight was far from exciting, as it paired two of the best boxers in action today," wrote Larson. "Both are defensive boxers and they spent more time nullifying each other's efforts than launching offensive attacks."

Only 4,004 fans turned out, which meant that promoter George Chemer, who had guaranteed Johnson $20,000, lost about $5,000 on the show.

"Louisville, Kentucky Boxing News" by local correspondent Joe Martin covered a card at the Fairgrounds Coliseum that featured two of Muhammad Ali's opponents. In the main event Jimmy Ellis, then fighting as a middleweight, won a 10-round decision over Canadian Wilf Greaves. In the top preliminary, Tunney Hunsaker TKO'd Herman Wilson in the sixth round of a heavyweight bout.

Hunsaker had already lost a six-round decision to Ali in Ali's pro debut, October 6, 1960. Ellis, who moved up in weight and won the WBA heavyweight title in '68, fought Ali in '71, losing via 12th-round TKO.

"European Gossip" by Charlie Parish highlighted a light heavyweight bout in Stockholm, Sweden, between local favorite Lennart Risberg and American Willie Pastrano that drew approximately 19,000 fans to Olympic Stadium. Pastrano floored the Swede in the opening round, but tired the second half of the match and had to settle for a 12-round draw. ■

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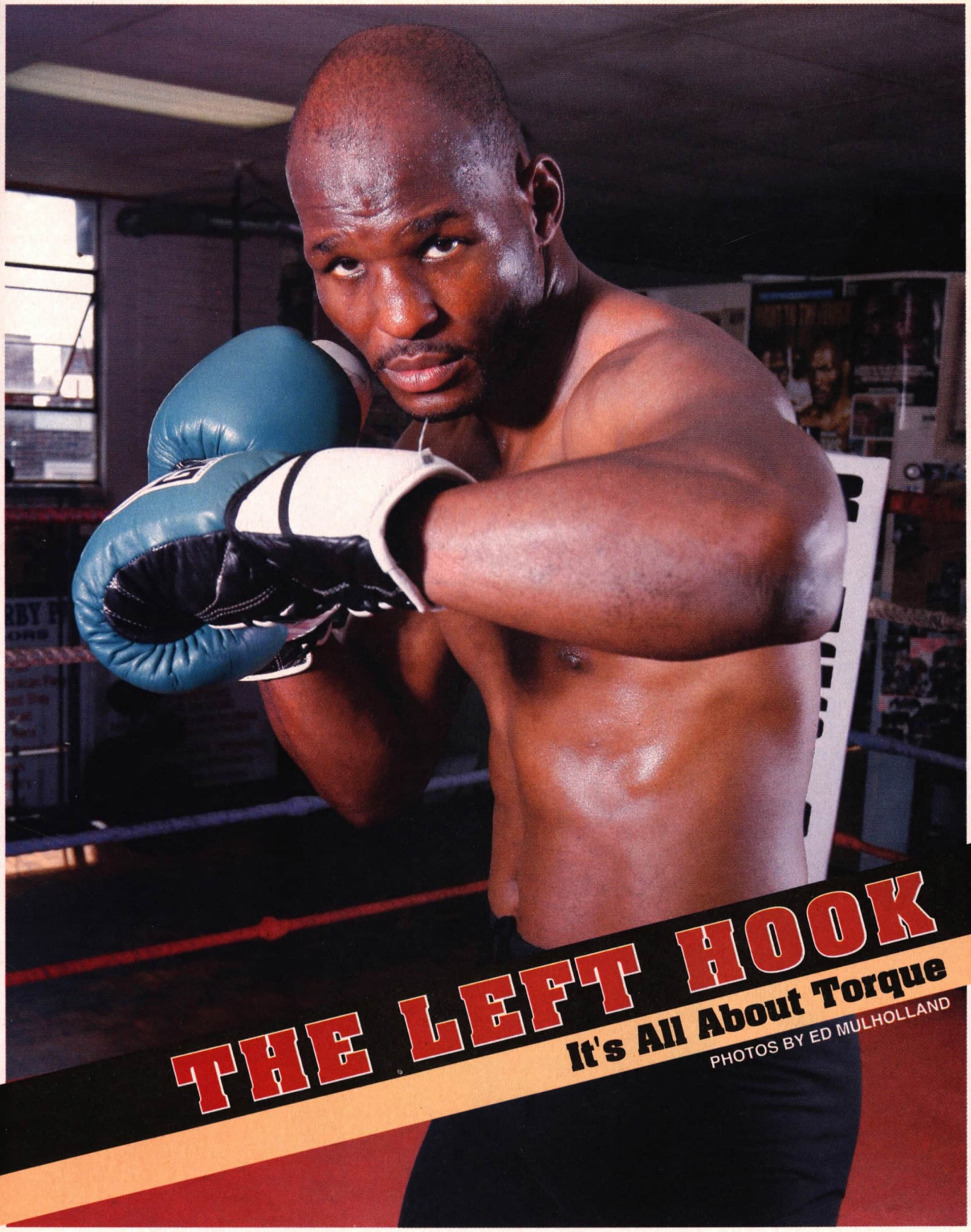
[Perfect Execution]

Boxing Lessons From A Living Legend

By Bernard Hopkins



THE LEFT HOOK

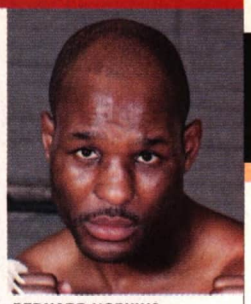
It's All About Torque

PHOTOS BY ED MULHOLLAND

The left hook is one of the boxing's power punches. That means you use it to hurt your opponent or knock him out. It's not like the jab, which is a defensive move as much as an offensive one. When you throw the hook, you want it to land hard so that it hurts your opponent. That doesn't mean you wind up with it and try to throw it as hard as you can, like a baseball. It means you learn how to throw it the correct way and when you do that, it lands hard naturally.

The left hook is probably the hardest punch to learn to throw correctly. It takes a lot of practice; you don't just throw it. You have to learn how to move your body the right way and set the foundation so that it generates torque. It's all in the butt and in the torque. You'll see. But even though it takes a long time to learn to throw it right and a lot of time in front of the mirror and on the heavybag, a good left hook is a great weapon to have.

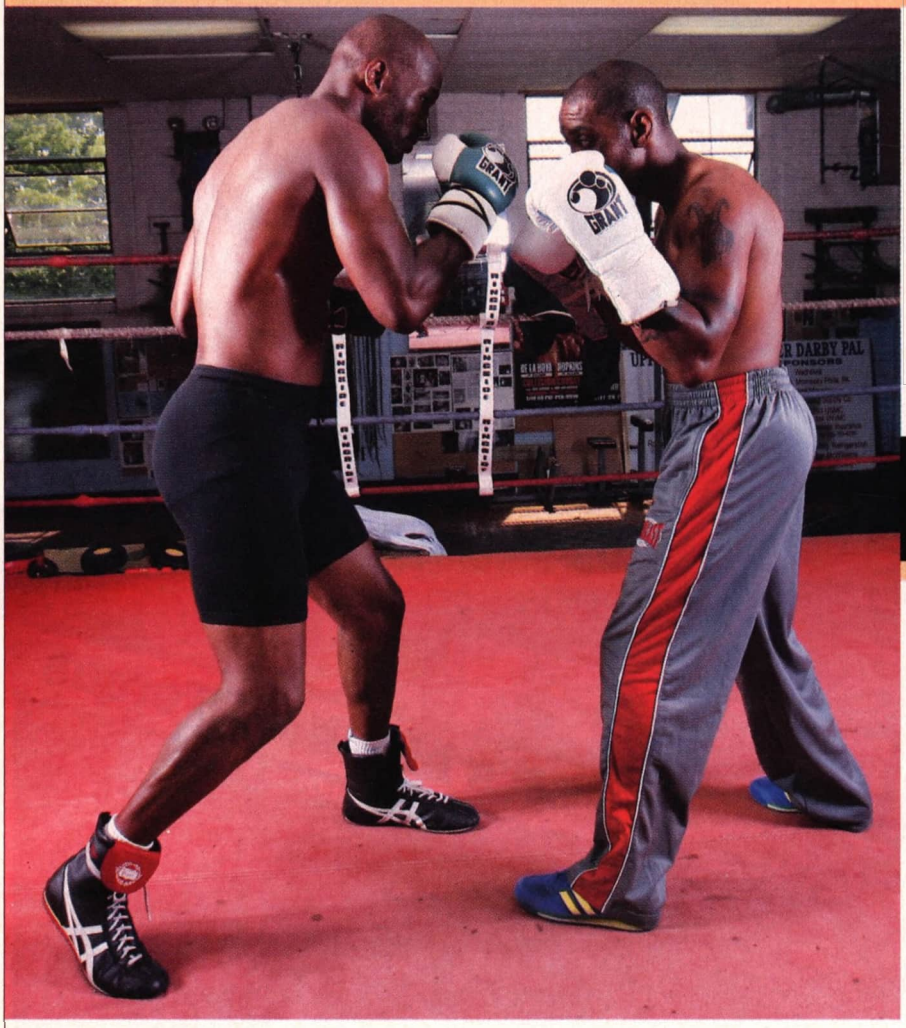
A left hook ended my fight with Oscar De La Hoya. I came to him and feinted him like I was going to throw a right hand. He reacted to that and threw his own right hand. I slipped the punch and landed a perfectly timed left hook to the liver. It was a shot that was right on the spot. I knew he wasn't going to get up because when it lands like that it paralyzes you, takes your legs away from you. Here's how to do it.



BERNARD HOPKINS
Is the former middleweight and light heavyweight champion of the world.

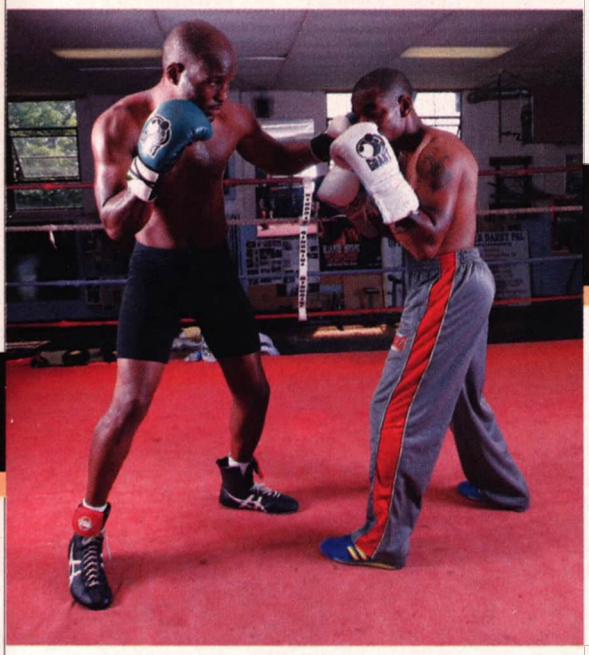
(All photos taken at Andy Carr's Gym in Upper Darby, PA)

SET THE FOUNDATION



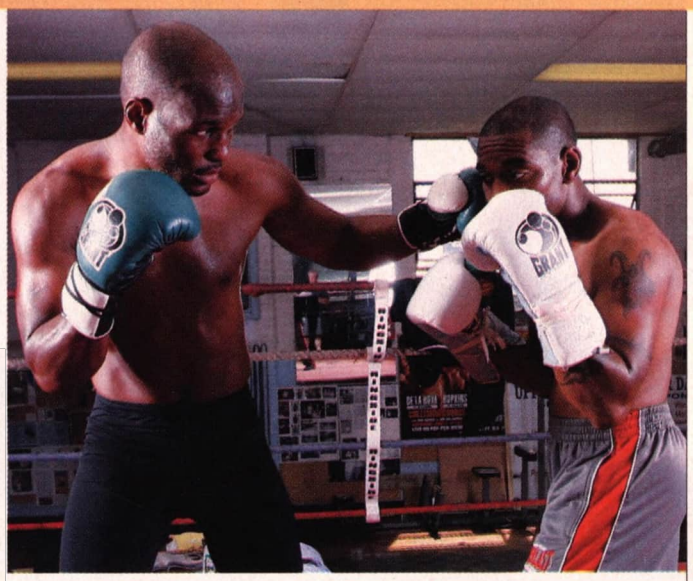
FROM MY REGULAR STANCE, I DIP A LITTLE TO THE LEFT AND ROTATE MY UPPER BODY SLIGHTLY TOWARD THE LEFT. My body weight shifts from both legs to mostly the left one. I'm not leaning all the way over and I'm not winding up with the punch. And I stay on balance. You must be on balance when you throw the hook.

DRIVE WITH THE LEFT LEG



AS I BRING THE PUNCH UP, I'M DRIVING WITH THE LEFT LEG AND AT THE SAME TIME BRINGING MY HIPS AROUND. It's all in the hips and legs. Drive that punch up. It's like when a baseball player swings a bat; it's about getting torque by driving with your hips and legs.

TURN IT OVER

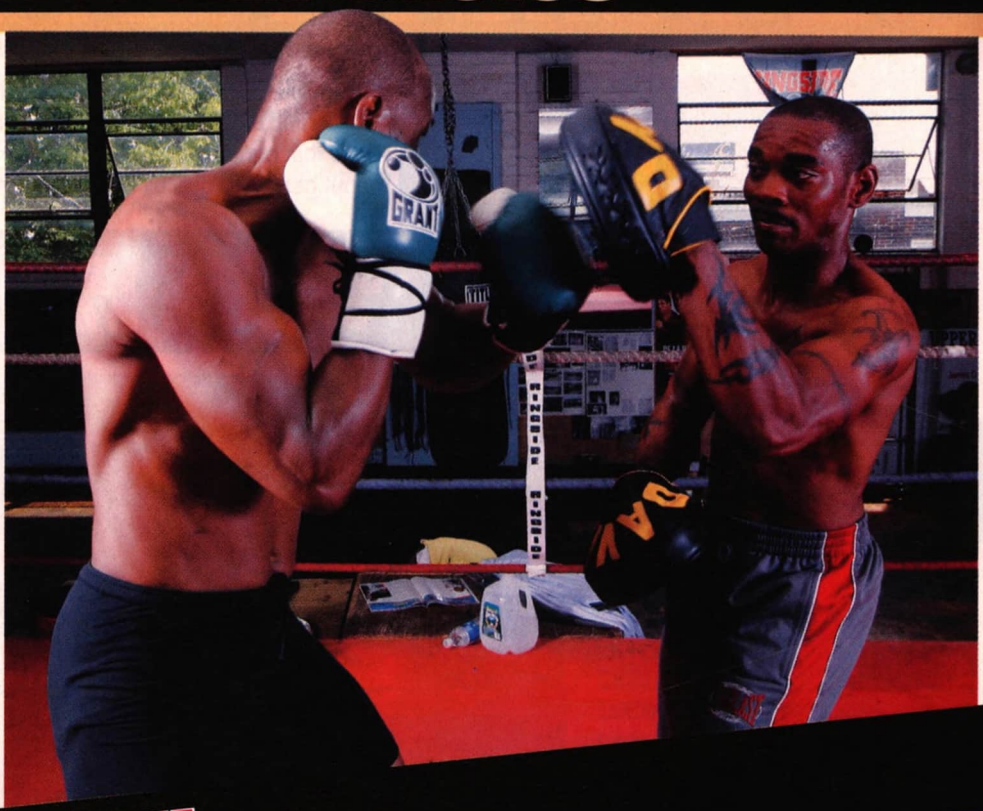


AS THE PUNCH CONNECTS, GET THAT ELBOW UP AND FOLLOW THROUGH; THE LEFT ELBOW SHOULD BE ALMOST PARALLEL TO THE FLOOR. If it's too close to your body, you're slapping with it. Get it up there and follow through with the punch. That's what we mean when we talk about turning a punch over.

WHAT YOUR FEET DO

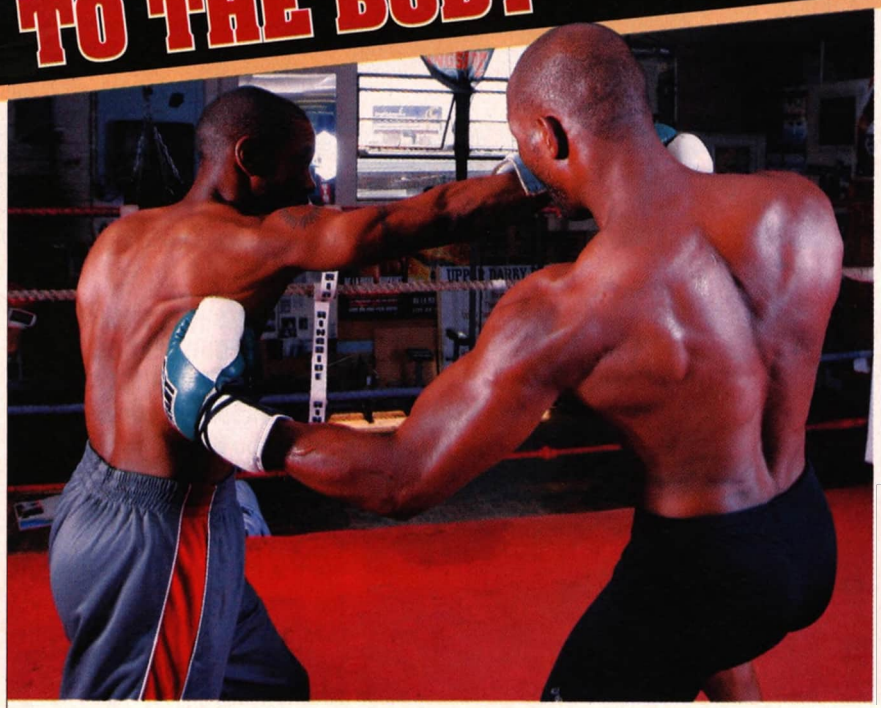
THESE TWO SHOTS SHOW CLOSE UP WHAT YOUR FEET DO WHEN YOU THROW THE HOOK. This is where the power comes from, where you get the torque. Not from your arms or your shoulders or back, but from right here. Your left foot is planted; there is no pivot and it stays on the ground. You're rotating your hips and driving the punch with your left leg and that foot stays where it is.

REMEMBER THE BASICS

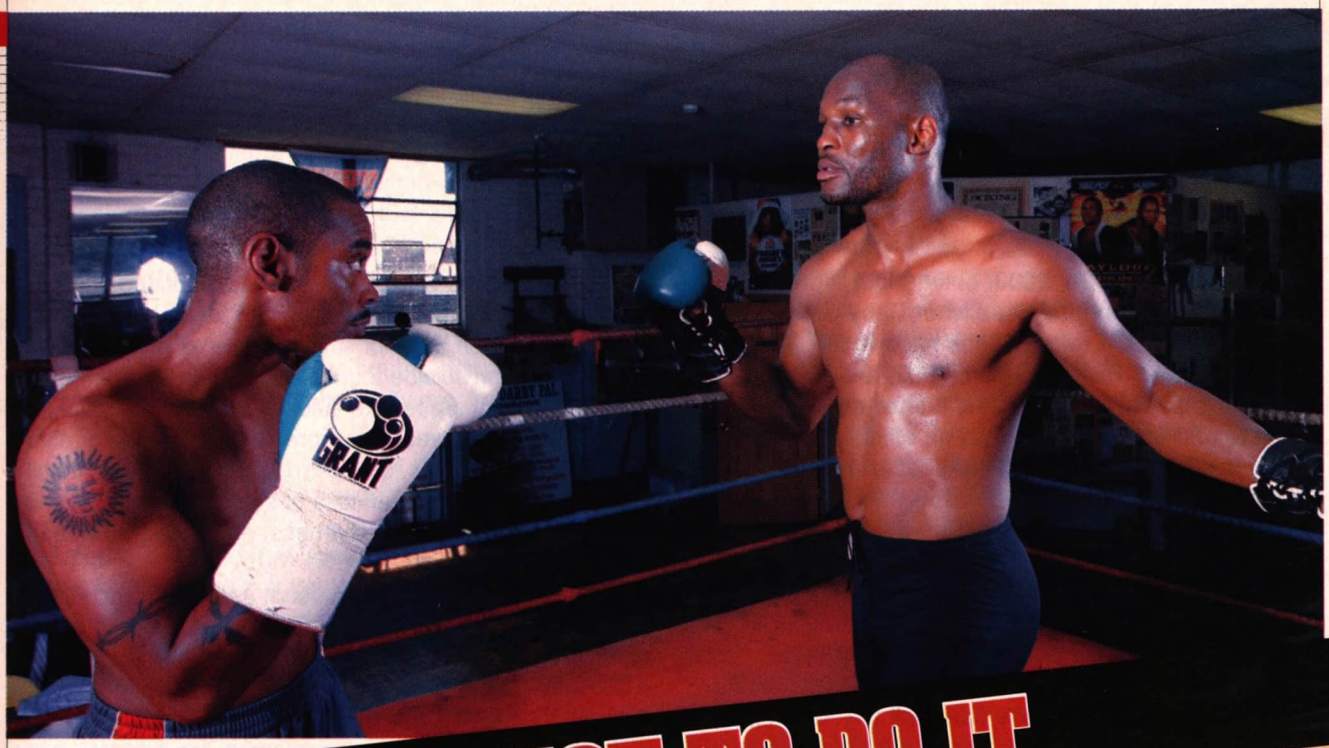


HERE I'M RIPPING A NICE, SHORT HOOK ON THE PADS WITH DANNY DAVIS. Notice my form: My right hand is up high, my right elbow is tight against my body, my chin is down, I'm on balance, looking straight ahead, and I'm turning that hook over. Perfect execution.

TO THE BODY

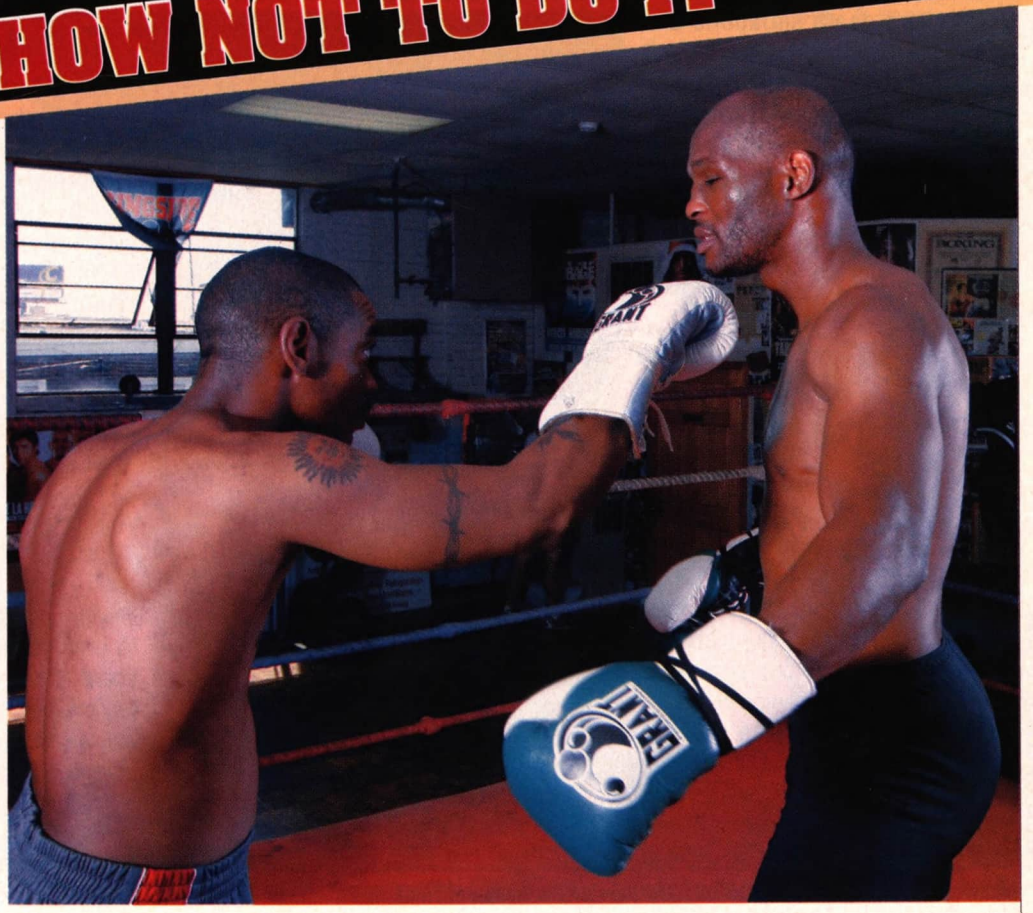


THIS IS A LITTLE LIKE THE ONE THAT GOT DE LA HOYA. It's the same thing if you're throwing the hook to the body, except you're aiming it lower.



HOW NOT TO DO IT

YOU SEE BEGINNERS ALL THE TIME DOING IT LIKE THIS—WINDING UP WITH A BIG, WIDE PUNCH, CHIN UP IN THE AIR, RIGHT HAND DOWN. And they think that's a left hook. It isn't. A left hook is a short, compact punch thrown with leverage. Doing it like this is a good way to get knocked out with a straight right to the chin.



By Margaret Goodman, M.D.

Third Man Down

On November 24, 2008, boxing lost a great official and a wonderful person when Toby Gibson, a veteran Nevada referee, took his own life. With other Nevada referees Richard Green (1985) and Mitch Helpern (2000) having met similar fates, it once again brought to the forefront the issue of stress on officials. Do commissions overlook the problem, or should it remain a personal issue?

New Jersey psychiatrist Dr. Ron Kamm, who lectures nationally and internationally on sports psychiatry, believes that stress is underestimated among boxing referees.

"They are people just like us. You assess your life and look back at what you have accomplished: *I had these goals and I haven't achieved them.* That's a loss," said Kamm.

A job change or job loss can also trigger emotional turmoil. Moreover, like doctors, referees deal with stressful life and death situations and are critiqued on every performance. Any or all of these situations can bring on depression, and depression can lead to suicide.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, two-thirds of suicide victims were depressed, but the symptoms vary and might go unnoticed. Overall, suicide becomes more prevalent with advancing age and ill health. Women *attempt* suicide twice as often as men, but men *commit* suicide four times as often as women.

Symptoms of a possible suicide include five of the following lasting two weeks or more: loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, change in appetite or sleep, inability to concentrate, fatigue, loss of sex drive, slowed thinking, self-reproach, indecisiveness, and thought of death or suicide.

Little has been done to research sports officials stress, but in 1990, Canadian and British universities examined *perceived* stress precipitating burnout among soccer officials. Burnout had a direct effect on perceived stress and perceived stress directly affected performance.

In most jurisdictions, boxing referees, like baseball, basketball, and football officials, undergo pre-participation medical screening. A study conducted in 2003 that appeared in *The Physician And Sports Medicine* screened Southeastern Conference football officials from 1997-2000. Ten percent had elevated blood pressure, 87 percent were overweight, 33 percent were obese, and these ailments were associated with stress and depression.

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Gibson raises Matthew Hatton's arm a few days before the referee took his own life

The National Football League, Major League Baseball, and many boxing commissions have established formal medical screening programs for officials. These organizations rely on the official to provide clearance from their private physician. Many of these doctors may not understand the rigors experienced by a boxing referee, let alone the physical exertion in following two active fighters around the ring.

As a result, boxing referees' exposure to underestimated physical and emotional stress will aggravate any underlying medical/psychological condition. It can affect their attention, focus, performance, and satisfaction with their job.

Highly regarded referee Steve Smoger admits to immense prefight nervousness, but is able to turn it into a positive. "When I worked Hopkins-Trinidad, it was

two weeks after 9/11. There were firemen and police widows in the audience. I said to myself, *Oh my God, Steve, just answer the bell and do what you have to do.* I consider refereeing a challenge, but I am never really stressed."

Smoger admits you can't respond to criticism from the press or pay attention to commission politics when it comes to assignments, as there is little one can do about it.

"I was at the last WBA convention where there was a discussion over the controversial disqualification of Humberto Soto during his June 2008 Las Vegas fight against Fransciso Lorenzo," said Smoger. "The speaker said, 'We [referees] are not entitled to a bad night.' He's right!"

Smoger, who has worked professionally for 26 years, credits his success to self-critiquing his performances, always being mentally and physically prepared, and having a supportive family.

"It is the same for referees as it is for the fighters. Ninety percent is your preparation and training; 10 percent is the ring."

Smoger believes that some of his mental tranquility comes from knowing that the National Association of Sports Officials (NASO) insures him. In the event of a ring death or a libelous accusation, NASO boxing referees are indemnified up to $3-million. Ironically, Gibson was the driving force behind NASO accepting boxing referees under their blanket policy.

Burnout may occur among boxing referees, but few quit. Studies demonstrate few resignations among officials that have invested large amounts of time to their position. It can take referees years of working in the amateur and professional ranks to establish a stronghold in boxing.

"Officials need to have the same mental skill and training that athletes do. They need ways to decompress and learn how to leave the stresses in the ring," added Kamm

They can learn techniques that don't involve drugs or alcohol and manage stress while maintaining focus amidst chaos. This can be accomplished with relaxation and attention training. We assume that every successful official already does this, but this should not be taken for granted.

Boxing commissions should treat their officials no differently than police departments, fire departments, and other organizations that are involved in crisis situations.

The National Center for Crisis Management is a multidisciplinary network of professionals committed to help people in time of crisis. They can also help people before or during an event. These experts should be available to officials when they deal with a controversial decision, ring death, or an untimely death of one of their own. These events make everyone vulnerable.

Commissions can be proactive and recognize that officials are often held to unattainable, superhuman standards. Protection should go beyond defending an official's decision to the press. A sports psychologist or psychiatrist could help when meetings are held to counsel individuals on how to relax, breathe, and focus.

Smoger, an attorney and former court judge, points out that if commissions become involved on this level, it could increase state liability and susceptibility to accusations of malfeasance. But commissions are already vulnerable when it comes to official performance.

In the end, commissions and organizations like the Association of Boxing Commissions, American Association of Professional Ringside Physicians, International Professional Ring Officials, and even the sanctioning bodies who often train officials need to step up and recognize the frailties of the human condition in combination with the job officials are asked to do on a regular basis. They should demand thorough physicals that include mental health screening. Moreover, they need to do the right thing and intervene when necessary. ■

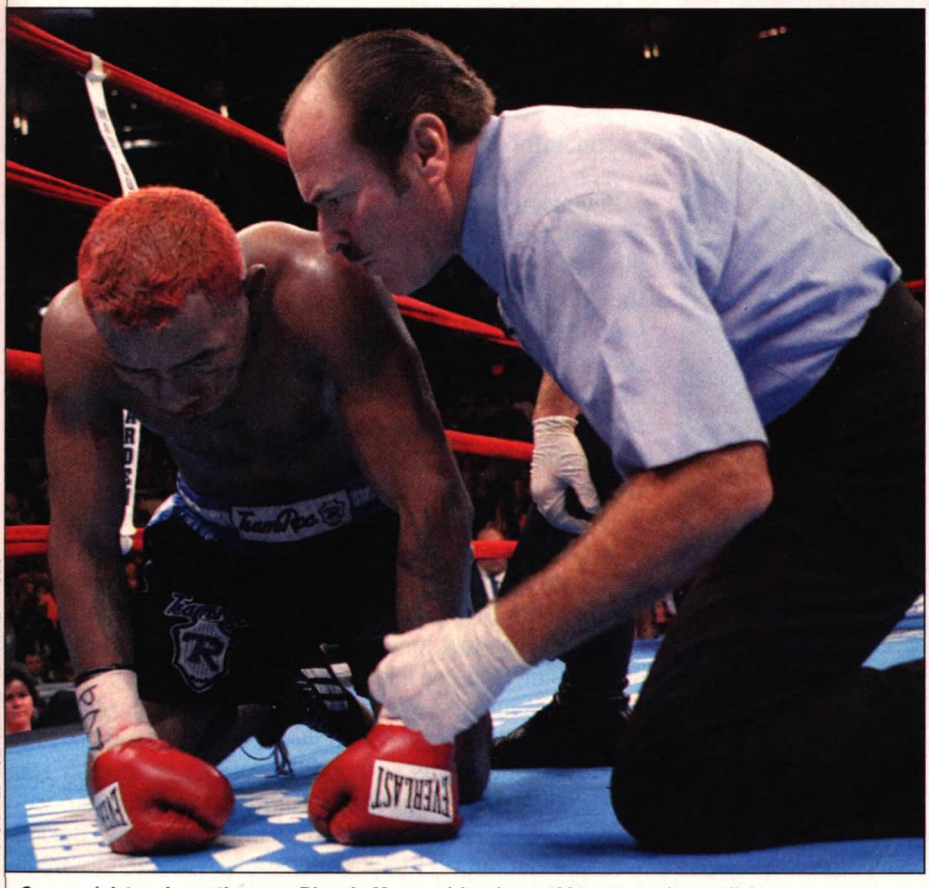


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Smoger (pictured counting over Ricardo Mayorga) has learned how to combat prefight nervousness

By Jim Bagg

Bagg Goes Postal

Even a stubborn old fart like the Baggmeister has to admit: This e-mail thing is kind of fun. Like a lot of folks in the age bracket that qualifies for discounts at Denny's, the Baggorama is resistant to most forms of technology (such as text-messaging, Bluetooth earpieces, and electric nose-hair trimmers). But the convenience of sending and receiving e-mails has grown on this wrinkling old prune. It saves everyone money, it saves trees, it saves time, and it saves the Baggspray the trouble of walking down the steps of his apartment building to retrieve the snail mail.

And apparently, you folks, the semi-literate masses who read THE RING, are enamored with e-mail too. Before the baggmeister@yahoo.com e-mail address was registered, the editors used to forward the world's most brilliant boxing columnist his paper mail, which added up to usually about five letters a year. Now five new e-mails fill the Baggtastic's inbox every time he clicks "refresh."

And the past month was a particularly busy one for the ol' Mailbagg, so instead of just a one- or two-e-mail sidebar, you're getting an entire column of your unintelligible ramblings and the Bagginator's ingenious responses.

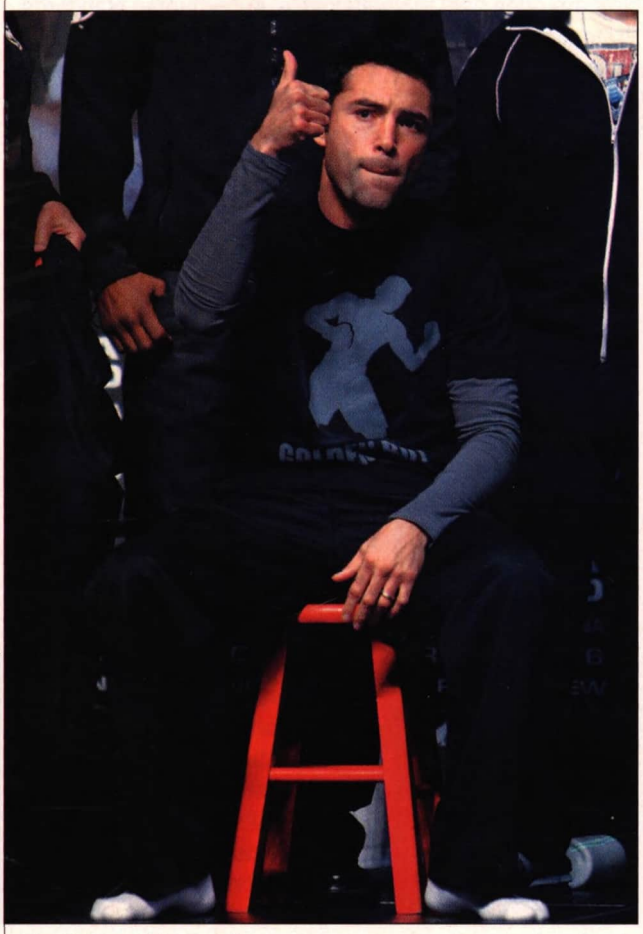


PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Should Oscar fight again?

Good Day Mr. Bagg,

I'm typing this during the aftermath of Oscar's fight against Manny Pacquiao. I've been an Oscar De La Hoya fan since I first saw him in Barcelona and have fully supported him since. I've never been as disappointed in an outcome such as this in my entire fanship of boxing. Oscar went out, did nothing, and was basically forced to quit on his stool. During the postfight interview, he sounded like he was planning on fighting on for one more win before he goes out, but I for one will not watch it. I've watched my last ODLH payday. Please encourage the drunks at your local watering hole to do the same.

Regards,
Aaron M. Ramirez

If you knew the drunks at said watering hole, you'd know it's pointless trying to convince them to do anything. Half of them aren't conscious enough to get off their stools when they have to go to the bathroom, and the other half are arguing non-stop at the top of their lungs about football players who wore leather helmets.

In any case, while we agree that De La Hoya stunk it up against Pacquiao, and we agree that retirement would be his best option, you know as well as the Baggletooth does that if he fights again, you'll fork over the 50 bucks to see if he can go out on a winning note. If you're really a longtime Oscar supporter, then they'll find a way to sell you on a showdown with J.C. Chavez' kid or a long-overdue rematch with Tito Trinidad. You'll let them convince you that Pacquiao was just too fast and De La Hoya isn't really a shot fighter, and you'll let yourself consider the possibility that he has one more good performance in him.

By the way, while we're on the topic of the Pacquiao-De La Hoya fight, this is as good a spot as any to stop and point out that the Baggenstein predicted a Pacquiao victory in print several months ago. How many other boxing writers went out on that limb? Hate to say Bagg told you so, but Bagg told you so.

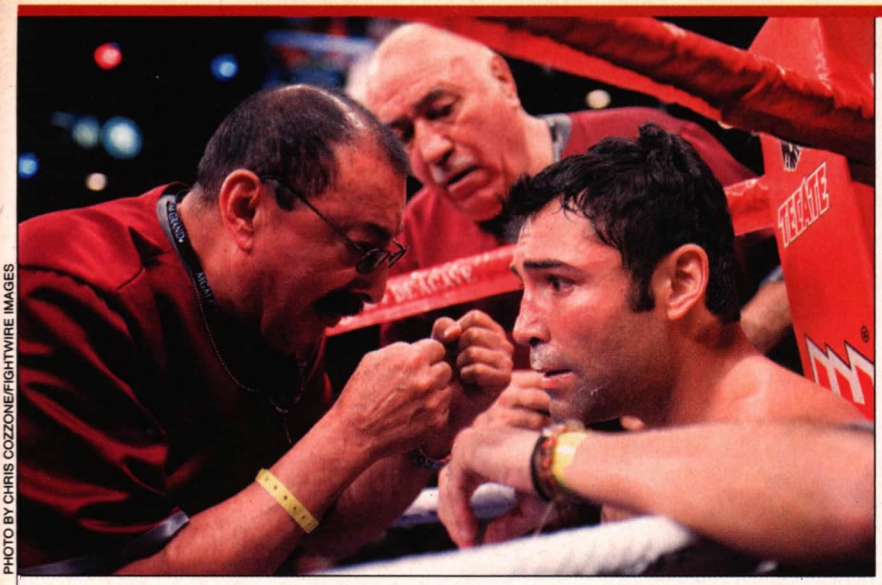


PHOTO BY CHRIS COZZONE/FIGHTWIRE IMAGES

Was Beristain walking on eggshells?

I have never seen a corner ask a fighter for permission to end a fight the way "Don Nacho" had to ask De La Hoya. That was absolutely mind-boggling. I guess all the way up until the very end, DLH's career has been catered to. Some of it rightfully deserved, some of it everyone just hanging to their winning lotto ticket (networks included). By the way, wouldn't most fighters, at least the ones with heart, ask for one more round? I certainly could never imagine Diego "Chico" Corrales conceding like that. Anyhow, keep up the great work, Baggs. All hail "The Golden Bagg."

Fabian Betancourt

Amen to your last comment. Did the Baggareeno mention that he predicted a Pac-Man victory? All hail, indeed.

As for Nacho Beristain giving Oscar every opportunity to ask for one more round, yes, part of it was because there's a tendency to walk on eggshells with De La Hoya and make sure you remain part of the gravy train. But part of it probably stemmed from the fact that this was their first fight together. When a trainer has a long relationship with a boxer, he knows when his man has nothing left. When the two have spent just one training camp together, it can be tougher to pull the plug.

And you're right, Corrales would have asked for one more round (at least). But Corrales was not "most fighters." Many fighters would have seen eight rounds of one-sided punishment as ample incentive to stay on the stool.

Besides any fight involving Floyd Mayweather Jr., what is the fight you most want to see in boxing for the upcoming year?

Bryant Arnold

That's an easy one: Chad Dawson vs. Antonio Tarver II. This is the rematch the world demanded, and we got it.

Okay, now for a serious answer. There are a few different ways of looking at this. If the Baggosphere is picking the fight most guaranteed to entertain, it's Israel Vazquez-Rafael Marquez IV. If he's picking the fight that would be the most significant, it's Wladimir Klitschko vs. Vitali Klitschko.

But all things considered—entertainment, significance, and a lack of blood relation so that there's a chance the fight can actually happen—the pick is Kelly Pavlik vs. Arthur Abraham. It's for the world middleweight title, the fighters are evenly matched, neither man is ever boring, and both guys have old-school heart. Can't you see both fighters hitting the canvas? Maybe a broken nose or two? Maybe a broken jaw or two?

The more that Baggjamin Button thinks about it, the more Pavlik-Abraham is his number-one fight, even if Mayweather is allowed to be part of the discussion.

I am writing in response to your response to the fellow who e-mailed you whose correspondence was printed in the January 2009 edition of THE RING. I am disappointed in you in the way you dissed "Dean." You probably made the guy feel like crap. He may have not been a literary scholar, but your response was bullyish behavior that exposes a certain lack of self-confidence. Might I suggest that you were projecting anger on Dean from another source. Maybe your blood sugar was low. Perhaps you've gone through the anger-reflection-remorse cycle those of us with a moral compass go through when doing the countless silly things we can't seem to avoid doing in our lives.

Regards,
Kyle from Florida

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Can Abraham become the true middleweight king?

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Is it fair to compare B-Hop with Ray Robinson?

Might the Baggman suggest you not try to psychoanalyze him. And might the Baggman suggest you not try to psychoanalyze Dean either ...

thanks for putting my stupid e-mail in THERING.its the best mag.in the world.i watched the fight between Pacquiao and De la hoya and ejoyed the out come with my filipino friends as i won 100$ on a side bet. HAPPY NEW YEARS BAGG.

Dean

The Baggmometer just couldn't resist the urge to run another verbatim e-mail from the quickly becoming-legendary Dean. He didn't merely take his lashing from the Baggatorium like a man; he took the lashing with pride and came right back for more. The rules of punctuation can't contain the Deanmeister. And he's even learned how to spell "De La Hoya" (though his capitalization still leaves something to be desired). Dean, there's hope for you yet.

I wish every boxing scribe would stop their adulation of "B-Hop." He may have looked like a twenty-something against Pavlik, but I think it was the first time Pavlik had faced a clever cutie like Hopkins. When you go back over Hopkins' long career, you see a fighter who, by and large, has been b-b-o-o-r-r-r-i-i-i-n-n-g-g-g! He has put me to sleep many times, and I'm not talking about a knockout.

Pernell Whitaker, another snoozer, affected me the same way. Sure he was clever, fast, and tricky, but he made for a dull fight, no matter who he fought.

An example of a clever, talented boxer who could also stiff his opponents with knockout power was Sugar Ray Robinson. Whoops, I just gave away my age.

Joe Thompson
Charlotte, NC

That's just not playing fair, to compare any fighter to the original Sugar Ray. Nobody had his combination of speed, technique, and power. Nobody reached his level of greatness while still being entertaining most of the time. Come to think of it, nobody reached his level of greatness, period. If Walker Smith is the standard to which you're holding everyone, that's a little bit like losing your virginity to Jayne Mansfield and then hoping the future ladies in your life measure up.

Bernard Hopkins has not earned the admiration of the boxing press by being exciting. He's earned it—begrudgingly in a lot of quarters—by being exceedingly skillful and determined and by defying the odds time and again. Yes, most of his fights this decade have been boring. But the shocking win over Felix Trinidad wasn't. The shocking win over Antonio Tarver wasn't. And the shocking win over Pavlik wasn't. In the Baggboni's first column in THE RING, he wrote that Hopkins was the number-one fighter of his generation. In light of his result against Pavlik, it's safe to say B-Hop has done nothing to change the respect he gets from B-Agg.

I know Americans are renowned for their geographical ignorance, so I'd suggest in the future you do a little research when commenting on overseas fighters. It doesn't take long. Amir Khan is a Briton of Pakistani descent, which makes him about as much of an Arab as you are. Look at a map. You do have those in the States, right?

Finnbar O'Keeffe

Yes, we do have maps in the States, and nowhere on them can you find Amir Khan's face, so the Baggenbrau doesn't understand how a map was supposed to prevent him from calling Khan an Arab. However, Finnbore, you're right that he's of Pakistani heritage and that the Bagguette could have done better research. Now go on back to Scotland. And don't whine to the Mailbagg again, or else off-color jokes regarding the Baggpipe and a bagpipe will follow.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Is Bagg culturally confused?

Showtime Shakeup

Upon hearing the news that Showtime had replaced Steve Albert with Gus Johnson on its *Championship Boxing* broadcasts, the Bagglahoma had two reactions: First, it's sad that the era of Albert brothers calling boxing is coming to an end, since all three of them made the fights fun in their own way.

And, second, it's sad that yet another capable announcer has been outlasted by Lennox Lewis.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Lewis outlasts Albert

And The Stingray Goes To ...

Joshua Snyder, who wasn't just a 7-3-1 (3) fighter taking on an 11-0 (8) fighter in Cincinnati two days after Christmas; he was a 7-3-1 (3) fighter taking on an 11-0 (8) fighter named Aaron Pryor. Okay, so Aaron Pryor Jr. isn't half the pugilist his old man was. It was still a hell of an upset when Snyder got inside on the taller man, got Pryor's hometown crowd on his side in a *Rocky IV* moment, and won the eight-round decision.

And it wasn't a fluke, not when you consider that of Snyder's seven previous wins, three had come against undefeated opponents. This young middleweight was simply born to sting, to be brought into town as an "opponent" and make a statement to the favored fighter about who the opponent really was.

Joshua, take a seat alongside Bobby Joe Young. You two are the only fighters ever to post a loss on a boxer named Aaron Pryor. ■

Jim Bagg can be reached at Baggmeister@yahoo.com.

[Come Out Writing]

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, THE RING, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

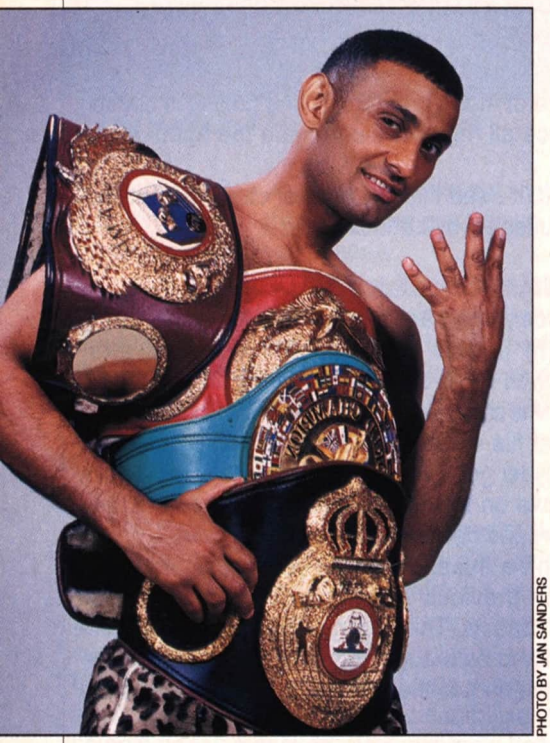


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Juan Manuel Marquez' assertion that Naseem Hamed does not deserve to be in the Hall of Fame upset reader Sammy Alsaidi. Alsaidi points out that not only did Naz beat a lot of good fighters and win a lot of title belts, he also helped boost the size of purses for fighters below the lightweight division.

Hamed Opened The Vault

In the February 2009 issue, THE RING asked Juan Manuel Marquez if Naseem Hamed belonged in the Hall of Fame, and Marquez said he honestly thinks that Hamed does not deserve to be. Well, maybe Marquez should remember that it was Hamed who was largely responsible for paving the way for smaller fighters to be able to earn seven-figure purses. And let's not forget that Hamed beat all the other titleholders of his time. American writers and fans, give the man the respect he deserves. Hamed's fights were huge events, watched in almost every country in the world.

SAMMY ALSAIDI
sammyalsaidi@yahoo.com

RING Matters

I'm writing to applaud THE RING on two counts. First, for the brilliant way in which you compiled "THE RING 100" list of the top fighters in the January issue. It must have been some undertaking, but you did it in an accurate, fair, and interesting way.

Secondly for the way you deal with the alphabet groups. We're all aware of the problems, and I'm glad you still only mention the three main ones and do so as little as possible. You've resisted the recent, popular trend of recognizing a fourth alphabet strap and for very good reason. In no way does boxing benefit from more titles.

I think THE RING's Championship Policy is brilliant. It gives me hope that boxing can still hold credibility when it comes to crowning world champions. THE RING always stays true to itself and I'm very grateful boxing has a publication like it. Thank you.

DANIEL BAGULEY
Watford, England

I consider THE RING's rankings and champions to be the most legit in the sport. There is no question they are better in comparison to the corrupt sanctioning organizations. My only problem is that a champion can make meaningless defenses against lower-tier competition and not be stripped of his title. I think this is a problem. Why not put in another rule stating that the champion must make a defense of the title against the number-one or number-two contender within the first year or he will be stripped.

ROBERT MEDINA
San Bernardino, CA

Editor's note: THE RING has no intention of trying to run the careers of world champions. We believe that the market place should make the fights, and if consumers think a match is a bad one, they should not support it—the same way they would not purchase any other product they feel is not worth the money. Besides, who are the "lower-tier" fighters who have been challenging for RING championships? With the possible exception of Gary Lockett, virtually all have been top-notch contenders.

I've been a collector of THE RING magazine since 2002. And I admire your effort in continually promoting the sport I love. I believe you are single-handedly carrying boxing on your back at this stage in boxing history. I also appreciate the way you are fighting the corruption in boxing by launching your Championship and Ranking Policy. But I found out that Oscar De La Hoya owns your publication and that's alarming for me. How can we readers be assured that you are not being biased with Golden Boy fighters with regards to ranking and attention?

ROMMEL PATES
Manila, Philippines

Vitali Klitschko pokes Sam Peters with a left jab en route to regaining he WBC heavyweight belt. Reader Bob Daly was nowhere near as impressed as RING *columnist Ivan Goldman and wrote to tell us so.*

PHOTO BY STUART FRANKLIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Editor's note: The best proof of* THE RING*'s autonomy can be found on the pages of every issue. As a reader since 2002, you should be able to see that we have not altered the way we go about our business since the ownership changed hands in August 2007. But if you have any specific gripes, let us know.

No Love For Vitali

I consider Ivan Goldman a good, knowledgeable boxing writer (and they are rare these days), but I have to take exception to his analysis of Vitali Klitschko being able to "hang with any heavyweight who ever put on gloves" in "Digging Deep" (January 2009).

Comparing today's heavyweights to some other eras is obscene. Both Klitschkos are mechanical, overly cautious, extremely limited behemoths that are fighting amateurs, stiffs, and tomato cans. "Nigerian Nightmare," indeed.

BOB DALY
BobGab33@aol.com

Gone But Not Forgotten

Thanks to Joseph Santoliquito for his tribute to Kevin Finnegan in the February 2009 issue of THE RING. Kevin was one my favorite boxers. Isn't it a pity that fighters who prove they have it all in skill, punching power, and durability lose because the skin tissue around their eyes is so easily damaged? Kevin Finnegan was indeed a credit to the Noble Art of self-defense and, for me, put the "sweetness" in that Sweet Science we know as professional boxing.

KEN "DUSTY" MILLER
Auckland, New Zealand

Appreciating Oscar

In light of Oscar De La Hoya's loss to Manny Pacquiao, the detractors and naysayers are saying that Oscar is a quitter. First, you go get hit by Pac-Man for eight rounds and then see who is the quitter. Second, De La Hoya has contributed much to the sport of boxing. He has engaged in exciting fights during the course of his career with Ike Quartey, Julio Cesar Chavez, Shane Mosley, Fernando Vargas, and Ricardo Mayorga. Moreover, Golden Boy Promotions has offered many opportunities to many other fighters. Give Oscar the respect he is due.

MATT CHICK
Dover, DE ■

PHOTO BY HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES

Although Oscar De La Hoya took a nasty beating from Manny Pacquiao, he took an even worse pounding from the media and fans. Reader Matt Chick writes to remind the critics of all the outstanding fights "The Golden Boy" has participated in and how much he's done to help the sport of boxing.

By Eric Raskin

Cruisin' For A Bruisin'?

In the 29-year history of the cruiserweight division, only two of its champions/titlists have challenged for major heavyweight titles. In the first six months of 2009, that number could very possibly double.

A fight between reigning WBC heavyweight beltholder **Vitali Klitschko** and former WBC cruiser king **Juan Carlos Gomez** was signed in January and was expected as of press time to happen in Germany (where both fighters are based) in March. And IBF/WBO heavyweight titlist **Wladimir Klitschko** also appears headed for a defense against a former cruiserweight champ, as **David Haye**, who relinquished THE RING, WBC, WBA, and WBO cruiser belts in 2008, has likely trash-talked his way into the ultimate challenge.

PHOTO BY STUART FRANKLIN/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

Gomez could prove troublesome for Wladimir

History says that both Gomez and Haye have a shot at winning. **Evander Holyfield** was the first former cruiserweight champ to fight for the heavyweight title, and he knocked out **Buster Douglas** in three rounds to become undisputed champion. Fifteen years later, former cruiser beltholder **James Toney** fought **John Ruiz** for a fraction of the heavyweight title and dominated the action, though he ended up with a no-contest after failing a drug test. Still, the point is clear: Exceptional cruiserweights have a chance at heavyweight.

Since Vitali vs. Gomez is the fight that's definitely going to happen, let's take a look at that first. Gomez is the mandatory challenger, a position he received by winning consecutive "eliminators" against **Oliver McCall** and **Vladimir Virchis,** and he's not an undersized heavyweight by any means, coming in at 6'3½" and about 230 pounds. Gomez actually sparred with Klitschko nearly a decade ago, and as is often the case with sparring sessions, what happened depends on whom you talk to. People close to Vitali claim he knocked out the Cuban, while Gomez' promoter, **Ahmet Oner**, told ESPN.com that "Vitali went out with a bloody nose after getting a good spanking from Gomez."

No American television carrier had been secured as of press time, but a fight of this magnitude will assuredly be available in the States—if not via HBO or Showtime, then on pay-per-view.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Does Winky have enough left for Williams?

Wladimir vs. Haye, meanwhile, is the fight that has more fans talking, in part because Haye is much younger than Gomez (28 vs. 35) and has some "future of the heavyweight division" buzz, in part because Wladimir is viewed as the world's leading heavyweight, and in part because of Haye's mouth. The brash Brit confronted the younger Klitschko brother on his way to a press conference late last year, and cameras swarmed, catching "The Hayemaker" telling Wladimir, "Don't run!" (as in, "Don't run away from a fight with me"). At that moment, Klitschko opted for a passive approach, telling Haye, "I have to go to the press conference," then later telling reporters he hardly even knew who Haye was.

Fast-forward several weeks, however, and Wladimir may well be granting Haye a title shot. June dates were being talked about as we went to press.

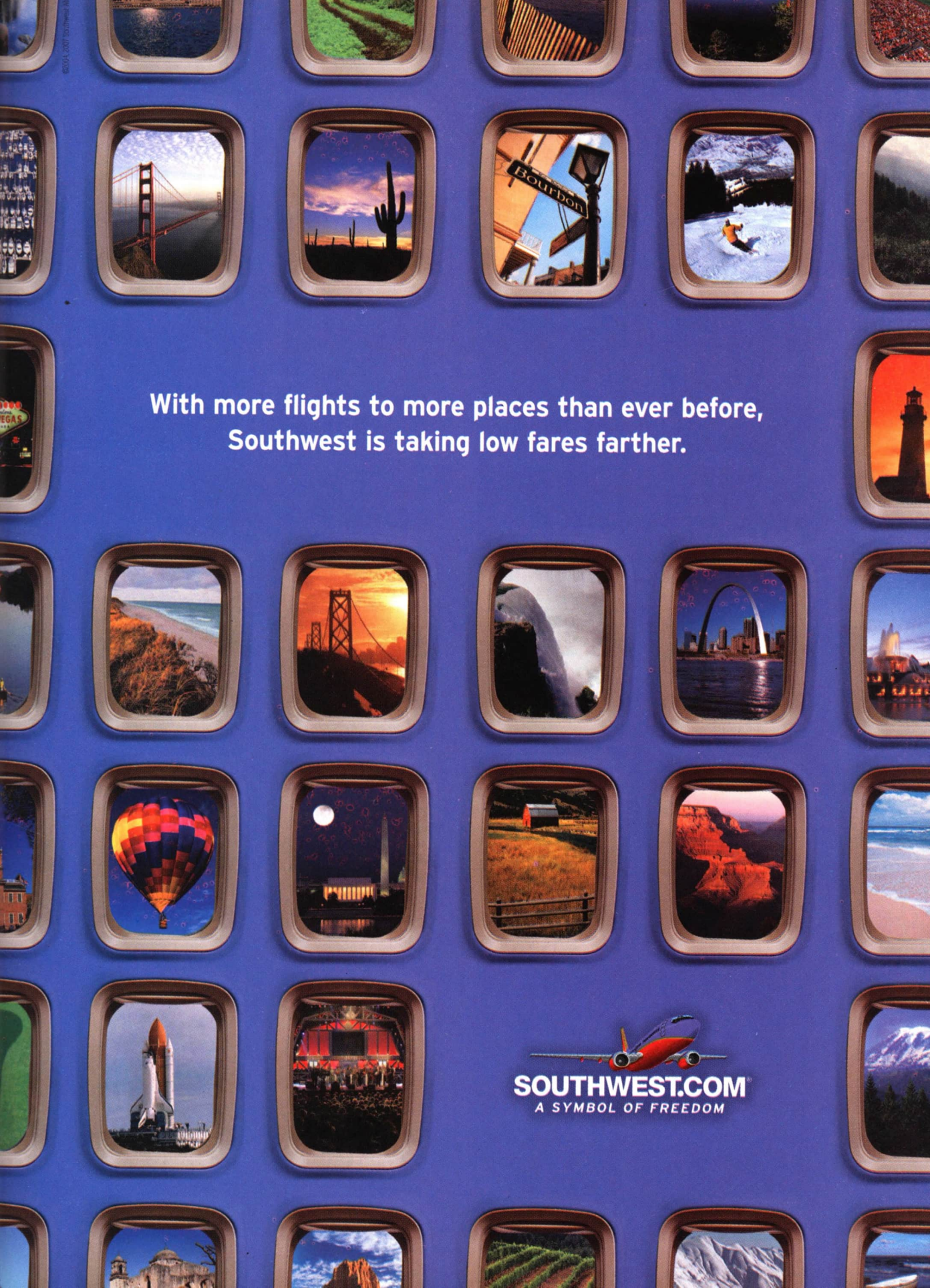
At least one former cruiserweight titlist will be shooting for heavyweight glory in 2009, and quite possibly there will be two of them trying to make history. Do either of them have what it takes to topple a Klitschko?

Popular opinion says probably not.

Recent history with Holyfield and Toney says don't count them out.

Listen Up

HBO will bring us a major crossroads clash on either April 11 or April 18, pairing possible soon-to-be pound-for-pounder **Paul Williams** with recently removed pound-for-pounder **Winky Wright**. It's a great matchup for answering questions: Just how good is Williams? Can he beat an elite, clever boxer? How much does Winky have left? We'll find out in April ... Speaking of crossroads bouts, **Amir Khan**, only one comeback win removed from his shocking kayo loss to **Breidis Prescott**, is scheduled to face comebacking future Hall of Famer **Marco Antonio Barrera** on March 14. One of these comebacks isn't going to get very far ... A fight card in the original spirit of HBO's *Boxing After Dark* is set for March 7, with two young, dangerous junior middleweights, **James Kirkland** and **Joel Julio**, meeting in a potential thriller. The co-feature will see junior welter prospect **Victor Ortiz** step up against veteran **Vivian Harris**, and a third fight involving junior lightweight **Robert Guerrero** is also a possibility. ■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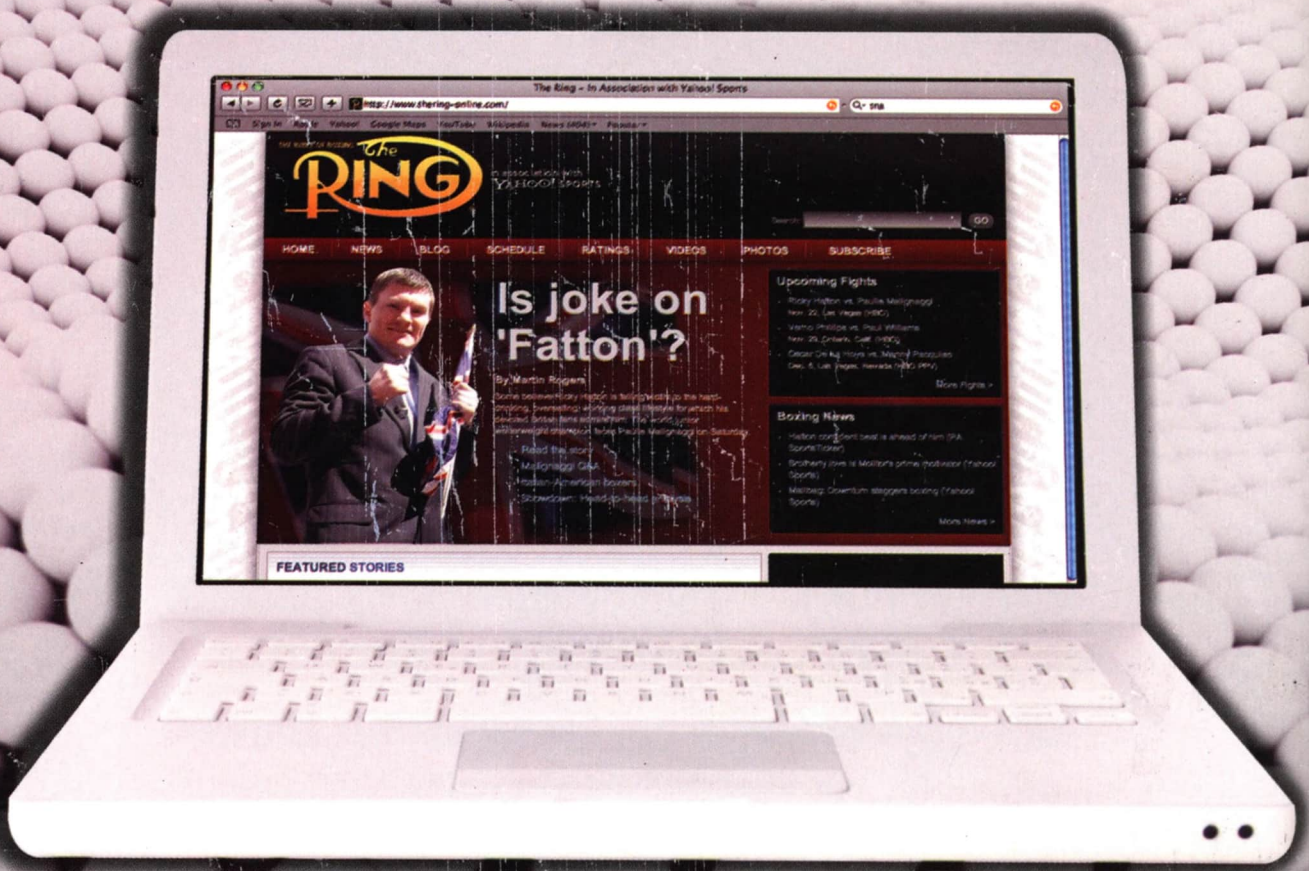

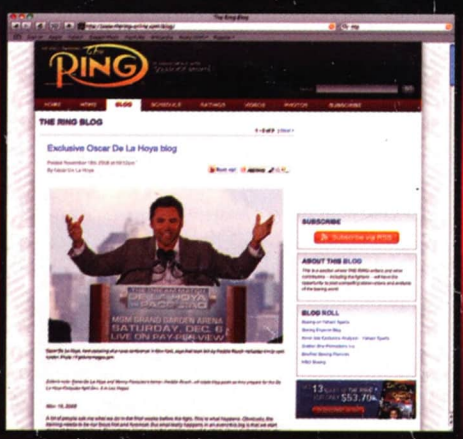

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